Culture and Corruption

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"Evidence of culture is how people behave when no one is watching."
(Robert Diamond, Jr., Chief Executive, Barclays Bank, 2011)

Abstract

Despite the recent proliferation of knowledge about the many different facets of corruption, its cultural side has yet to receive the attention it deserves. Drawing on contemporary research, this meta-analysis explores the complex relationship between culture and corruption. It focuses on local behaviour that contradicts professed communal ideals and aspirations. It highlights moral values in conflict and the tainted nature of corrupt practices. It suggests that the many scattered findings in the literature are still inadequately integrated largely due to the narrow perspectives of specialists who fail to reveal the cultural essence of corruption that its victims fear. It finds that some fortunate communities around the globe and against the odds have succeeded in cleansing public life by emphasising strong political and communal will to curb corrupt practices, continued vigilance to prevent reversals and curtail new deviant avenues, and inculcate personal integrity to resist the temptations of personal gain at the expense of the greater good.

Unlike the natural sciences where knowledge is sought for itself and research can be conducted objectively and impersonally, the social sciences have to deal with unpredictable and erratic human behaviour and research has to be mindful of culture and hidden agendas. An obvious example is the field of public administration and within it the study of corruption as something that is believed to deviate from what should be or what departs from normally expected behaviour. In this case, it is conduct unbecoming public employees that contradicts collective norms such as standards of honesty, integrity, truthfulness, responsibility, enlightenment, and propriety that are passed on from one generation to another. Researchers have to be mindful of their own preconditioning and the hidden agendas that may be involved. Their predisposition cannot be divorced from their background and experience, such as where they were born and bred, who brought them up, what instruction they received from authority figures, the circumstances under which they lived, and eventually what sparked their interest in studying misconduct that offends and disappoints. What they care to reveal is highly coloured by many such personal factors and also what might happen to them should they offend community taboos.

That corruption exists is obvious. That it is rooted in local cultures is less obvious although few are unaware of its presence once attention is drawn to it or are in any position to combat corrupt practices in their midst. Their powerlessness perpetuates such misconduct, probably strengthens it, and does much to explain why societies cannot seem to live up to their ideals, why they do not practice what they preach, and why they are so flawed. So, what accounts for why people go astray, why they fail to prevent wrongdoing, why they are corrupt and corrupted in the wider meaning of that term, and why anti-corruption measures so often fall short? Much of the study of ethics has concentrated on right-doing (Martinez, 2009); less attention seems to have been paid to wrongdoing. Although the cultural sources of ethics are fully acknowledged, when dealing with corruption they are somewhat fragmentary (Svara, 2007, West and Berman, 2006) and tend to stop short of considering the powerful cultural forces at play that have perpetuated corruption and obstructed brave efforts to contain and reduce its prevalence. Most ethicists analyse the many different specialised forms of corruption without identifying its overall nature and the cultural glue that integrates them. A much better job is done in demonstrating that corrupt practices assume many diverse, interconnected, and reinforcing forms that defy simple classification and easy differentiation (Van Wart, 1998) and in identifying comprehensive measures that could reduce their incidence (Spector, 2012, pp. 283-293).

Just to illustrate how complicated it is to tackle the cultural dimension behind corruption, researchers now recognise that when, for instance, a political regime is held to be corrupt, its residents protect themselves as best they can by devising their own unofficial counter-measures to temper its harmful impacts. When private business is characterised by sleaze, public business cannot be expected to be immune from its contamination, and vice versa whenever the administrative state has dealings with private organisations. When religious authorities act hypercritically and unethically, their followers are likely to copy their poor example. When communities discriminate, their social mores are probably taken for granted, enforced, and perpetuated for generations in defiance of the law. There might well be straightforward explanations at work, such as abuse of position, power, and authority, the presence of scarcity, the temptations of immorality, the existence of irrational fear and hatred, and the failure of character to confront such departures from societal expectations. These are probably rooted in the "conceptions of the desirable characteristics of a particular people" (Husted,1999, p. 341) following the broad definition of culture as "*the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another... with consequences for beliefs, attitudes, and skills"* (Hofstede, 2001, pp. 9-10).

Culture viewed as shared patterns of meanings and understandings among group members (Van Wart, 1998, p. 166) may not even be recorded or necessarily spoken but merely understood by a gesture, a handshake, or a symbol. Whereas ethicists want to believe that most people try to do the right thing, in reality many knowingly do wrong without being sociopathic. This occurs when corruption is accepted and taken for granted, so much so that it takes place in full view, like giving bribes or cheating on taxes or having privileged access to life-saving public services (Rothstein 2011). On a grander scale is the effect that culture has on the predisposition and potential of societies for group violence, their sense of superiority and self-doubt that prompts them to dominate and to exclude out-groups from the moral domain, to indulge in negative stereotyping, and to view scapegoats as obstacles to the realisation of the ideology that fits their culture (Procter, Nof, and Yih, 2012, pp. 8-10: Staub, 1989, pp. 18-20).

One of the more thorough examinations in recent years of the cultural dynamics behind corruption is a study of the alleged rapid decline in the values of the Indian Administrative Service (Sunder, 2011). The analysis starts typically enough by defining corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain but then spreads its focus on the much wider arena of individual integrity, administrative culture, and Indian society in a country where corruption is endemic and systemic. It points a finger at a society steeped in particularism with strong bonds of kinship and caste ties going back to ancient India where amassing wealth through tactful (unethical) means was not censured. Once the British colonial rulers who had tried to impose their foreign ethical standards left in 1947, Shanthakumari Sunder alleges that indigenous public officials have since learnt to exploit not serve, with political black money as the source of all evil encouraged by public apathy and individual indifference to gross violations of human rights, misgovernment, and injustice suffered without much protest. Corruption had become accepted practice and creditable. The social stigma attached to corrupt money had been erased from society. In short, "The majority of the Indian society being illiterate and poor has to accept corruption as a way of life and tolerate corrupt leaders, as long as they get something as their share of the spoils" (ibid, p. 247). She does not go as far as Akhil Gupta who accuses the administrative state in India of structural violence on the poor, lower-castes, and indigenous peoples and where public ameliorative programmes are arbitrary, uneven, and erratic if not complete failures (Gupta, 2012).

These controversial conclusion probably contain within them truths that could be repeated elsewhere (Burke, Tomlinson, and Cooper, 2011). For India, it probably has justification in that country's cultural context of social tolerance and easy forgiveness (Tummala, 2002) and most certainly in regard to the influence of business lobbying in Indian politics (Yadav, 2011). They follow a long series of scandals that so enflamed people that the government decided that it had to take action to head off more draconian measures to cleanse governance and society advocated by populist Anna Hazare. Scandals elsewhere around the globe in Italy, Spain, Greece, Russia, Brazil, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and protests against austerity measures taken after the 2008 global financial crisis have also emboldened protests in the streets against such institutionalised corruption as a socio-pathology.

Shedding More Light on Cultural Corruption

Evidence mounts that the cultural dimension of corruption has been for too long a poor relative of other studies. To some extent, this could be due to its being still a taboo topic in polite society, an assumed unmentionable. Yet, several persistent researchers have been able to penetrate the secrecy, the official propaganda, and the deceits as in Cambodia where corruption is rife and anti-corruption laws have been gutted into meaninglessness (Brinkley, 2011, Kerbo, 2011, Nissen, 2008) and Croatia where corruption remains an integral part of government as in most of southeastern Europe (Goldstein, 2011). The corrupt do so as privileged groups with special access across Eastern Europe and central Asia as revealed by investigations into bribery, state capture, privatisation, taxation, customs, economic regulation, and criminal justice administration, all of which are inter-connected (World Bank, 2011). Corrupt practices are cause for comment among international observers in many of the world's trouble spots where they witness corruption as a way of life for the populace with which they and their superiors as outsiders are unfamiliar. Their self-perceived superiority as outsiders attributes much corruption to the primitiveness of inferior societies lacking modernisation, meaning the absence of the attributes of more advanced civilisations like their own.

Clearly, individuals are cultural, not just political or economic, animals. They are products of their families, communities, and societies, social beings shaped by their circumstances, not just self enriching singletons fulfilling their own selfish needs and ambitions. They have a public as well as a private life. Which one gets emphasized varies in time and place determined by factors beyond their control. At one extreme, people are ready to sacrifice themselves so that their community or another person survives. They give little thought for themselves when they risk death to save or help others in distress. Their actions are considered to be selfless heroism. At the other extreme are those who put themselves first before anything or anybody else; they care nothing for others who cannot be of use to them. Alas, this is often the public view in many localities of professional politicians and leading public figures. The contrast emphasises the difference between ends and means and the personal values involved. It draws attention to the problems posed by "value relativism, nihilism, and materialistic individualism" (Alatas, 1990, p. 11), to the devaluation of public goods and services, and to the technical rationality that poses its indifference, impartiality, and objectiveness in public policymaking (Adams, 2011).This last has often been portrayed in parodies of the heartless, mindless, and soulless bureaucrats who go by the book and the scheming officials who connive at evil.

Families, communities, associations and organisations teach their members how to think and behave in return for which they expect their members to be obliged not to offend, deceive or cheat but to respect, favour, and reward them. They are not always successful in preventing defiance of prevailing social norms. Socialisation fails to achieve obedience and conformity. Probably, no society has ever been totally free of conflicts over beliefs, values, morals, ideals, expectations, hopes, and what constitutes the collective good. At no time have people in recorded history been able to live up to their ideals of proper behaviour. But today there is a difference. Whereas in the past knowledge about misconduct, particularly in high places, has been confined to the few within inner circles, it is coming increasingly into the open (Spector, 2012). Not a day passes when somewhere around the globe mass media highlight wrongdoing in virtually every aspect of human activity not just in the corridors of power but also allegedly in warfare, business, religion, research, education, communications, entertainment, and sports down to the smallest detail (Burke, Tomlinson, and Cooper, 2011). No literate person can be unmindful of the amount of sleaze, black money, lobbying, self-dealing, unauthorised self-enrichment, bribery, fraud, manipulation, deception, organised crime, and other forms of wrongdoing that occur and accumulate (Camilleri, 2011).

Everywhere, people have stories of corruption, "not so much the 'reality' of its existence as the fact that it is widely *believed* to exist, the complex narratives that enfold it, and the new relationships and objects of study that those narratives create" (Haller and Shore, 2005, p. 6). Eventually, such talk does bring rage and violence, instability and terrorism, inequality and jealousy, exclusion and suicide, and cynicism and distrust of all public institutions. Even where things do not decline that far, there is the coarsening of public life, the rough-tongued distain in communications, the abandonment of standards, the currying of favours with the unscrupulous, and the wholesale corruption of values and general malaise in both public and private life, with public leaders shirking their responsibilities that "sends the message that anything goes... as long as we can get away with it" (Burns, 2011, p. 3). If this is the situation in the United Kingdom, what are the prospects in Afghanistan where corruption is traditional, endemic, and cultural and real power belongs to shady characters who hold the populace to ransom and terrorise those who will do their bidding (Rosenberg, 2012)? Once the rot sets in, it proves extremely difficult to reverse.

The Question of Values

Where once corruption was very much a taboo subject, it can no longer be ignored or brushed aside, given its global reach. This newly found publicity is creating the impression that corruption is getting far worse than it ever has been which in turn gives rise to demands that much more should be done to reduce its nefariousness. Unfortunately, as much corruption still remains hidden and many of its perpetrators have little desire to show themselves, its actual extent cannot be accurately known. Nonetheless, it does have to be taken more seriously. Despite all the protestations to the contrary, corruption is deeply embedded in human conduct, so deep within society such that very few can escape it and avoid the pulls of personal ambition and avarice that tempt people to indulge in misbehaviour. Presumably, more thorough research and investigation should eventually reveal why it persists despite every reasonable attempt

to combat it.

As corruption (bad conduct) is the opposite of ethics (good conduct), any consideration has to begin first with what values prevail or are assumed to prevail in any community because such values and their underlying beliefs can change in space and time, sometimes slowly but at other times quite rapidly (Frederickson, 2002). In the past, values were derived mainly from religious beliefs and practices. But all societal institutions are instrumental in determining values and if government is the authoritative allocation of values, one recent study suggests that the administrative state imposes its special kind of morality, specifically the universal administrative values of efficiency, economy, efficacy, expertise, and equality (Jordan and Gray, 2011). It warns that if societal values are ambiguous or contradictory, "then evil can seep in through cracks in law and policy, unnoticed by those enforcing it, until an abyss of evil swallows them and countless others whole" (p. 9). It stresses that values are context-laden, that they inevitably give rise to moral conflicts among the rulers themselves and between the rulers and the ruled, and that they are intimately related to tradition and culture. Other than reminding its audience that most public values have a strongly communitarian theme (p. 347), it implies that public administration should be secular, ignoring local religious and moral values altogether.

Yet, many religions and moral codes are unanimous in stressing the need of public (and private) officials to acknowledge the moral responsibilities of their actions and accept accountability for their decisions. Corruption arises when they shy away from such duties because of their indolence, moral relativism, and disrespect of moral teaching and training (Dwivedi, 2011, p. 4). Public officers have first to be motivated to serve the public; they cannot be forced to behave ethically. Without dedication to public service, there cannot be ethical or good governance.

> Public service should be a vocation, a purpose-driven life devoted to the well-being of all... by setting a high standard of moral conduct and by considering their jobs as vocations akin to religious calling...always... thinking ahead of the community, on behalf of the community. (ibid., pp. 8-9)

From time immemorial, a fundamental divide has existed over whether ethical notions are universal spiritual values derived from belief or stem pragmatically from human needs, designed by acknowledged authorities, and applied as circumstances require. Both sides of the divide are somewhat self-serving, demanding obedience to their authority. They use morality as a control device. But even when the spiritual and the temporal greatly coincide (orthopraxy) and reinforce one another's ethical stance (Roy, 2010, pp.113), cultural conflicts occur in regard to different categories of adherents, followers, and residents. Non-conformists include a whole range of people from the mentally disturbed who menace others and for their own self-protection have to be separated out because they might corrupt others or be injured by them, obstinate

individualists, the devious and sly who take advantage of others' conformity, eccentrics who think differently, the unconventional, and the scared who fear that if they do not outwardly cooperate despite their disinclination, they and their loved ones might come to some harm. These and probably other groups can be contrasted with those who do willingly conform to social norms, do believe and practise what they preach and what is preached to them, and are not corrupt and cannot be corrupted in any serious way that harms others.

In this divide between the moralists and the pragmatists, the line between right and wrong behaviour is blurred and indistinct. On the one side, the moralists, sure in their beliefs, venerate personal integrity that honours their conceptualisation of right conduct transformed into social norms (such as being polite, benevolent, kind, caring, thoughtful, loyal, conscientious, decent, and fair-minded). They are appalled at any contempt of these social norms and at any acquiescence to what they consider as to open misconduct. In their view, authority figures should resist any temptation to deviate and should work for the common good, never in their own self-interest. Authorities should set the example of good conduct, being virtuous, honest, truthful, and trustworthy in straight dealing. But they, like everyone else, are not expected to be perfect. Slight or petty transgressions can be forgiven providing these are relatively harmless, undertaken for good cause, and result in benefits to all. Otherwise, misconduct should not be tolerated. Wrongdoing should be exposed and the guilty made to pay appropriately for their sins as a warning to others who might be led astray.

On the other side are the pragmatists who know that things do not work this way and that people are fallible, even despicable, hateful, and incorrigible. They acknowledge that deviants are likely to hide their alleged misconduct and avoid exposure, being conscious of likely public disapproval. Miscreants (dubbed the corrupt) will try to cover over any traces that might be discoverable and frighten off possible whistleblowers. When caught, they will try to bluff their way out and make excuses and rationalisations for their alleged misbehaviour. Indeed, in time they can become quite contemptuous of public opinion and eventually brazen enough to defy critics to the point where they feel sufficiently secure to parade without concern their breach of social norms. This shows how powerful they really are. They believe that they can get away with their misconduct simply because most other people given half the chance would do the same in their position (Abagnale, 2001). They are just being practical. Why not take advantage of the opportunities available? Why not enjoy the comforts of position to compensate for all the sacrifices one has made to be where one is and for taking on such heavy responsibilities? In any event, most others in inferior positions are just envious and lack the talent, intelligence, industriousness, inventiveness, and ambition or too meek, complacent, and lazy to advance. In brief, "morals are relative, the product of arbitrary tradition and social conditioning" (Orr, 2011, p. 50), i.e., more a matter of opinion and circumstances than fixed and universal. They depend on time and location and majority rule, which of course does not make them right by the moralists

who find the pragmatists too tolerant of uncommon differences between cultures. This divide gives fuel to the cynics who see ethics as one big con-game manipulated by elites intent on ripping off the masses, bamboozling the gullible, deceiving the naïve, and dangling out impossible promises and imaginary rewards in this life or in the afterlife (Ingram and Parks, 2010, pp. 89-95), and encourages unscrupulous hit men, (Hiatt, 2007).

The Ubiquity of Cultural Corruption

What this divide between value (ought) and fact (is) amounts to is that at no time can those in authority know for sure whether or not the norms under which a society is supposedly working are actually being followed, who is sufficiently deviant individually and collectively to be designated as corrupt, how many turn a blind eye to corruption because they do not think that corruption and the corrupt are all that harmful as is made out, and how many believe some corrupt practices can even be beneficial in certain circumstances and do not object at all to them. Even apart from the fact that the authorities cannot always trust appearances, why should other people follow what the authorities, their supposed betters, preach when the nature of authority itself can be so corrupting? What is it about authority that makes its holders believe that they can get away with their misconduct, hold themselves above the law, break the rules they lay down for others, and believe themselves accountable only to themselves? Does the unceasing need to make compromises in office, make deals, and take tough decisions eventually wear the incumbents down until their core values are lost and they lose their moral compass?

Late in the Nineteenth Century, Lord Acton when commenting on a book dealing with gross clerical misbehaviour came to his famous conclusion that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

> Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority. Still more when you super add the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. (Acton 1887, 2000, p. 335).

He was only repeating what many others had said before him, notably Edmund Burke that power rids its possessors of "every humane and gentle virtue" and Percy Shelley that it "pollutes whate'er it touches" (Bruni, 2011, p. 3). Their implication was that whenever authorities exercise their power over others, they are often tempted to put their own interests first. They take advantage of the public trust put in them to disregard their duty to act as guardians of the common good. Whenever anyone has an advantage over others, that position is used to favour self-interest and "it is almost inevitable that claimants will seek favours from authorities and that authorities, in turn, appreciating the strength of their positions, will welcome inducements" (Rotberg, 2009, p.1) by

accepting gifts and honours as an acknowledgement of their superior status and their ability to deny access to public services.

This generalisation probably applies much more in private business matters than in conducting public affairs. Whenever people in public authority put themselves first, they can well place themselves in danger of undermining their own position. Any misjudgment could lead to their downfall when rivals push to replace them by promising to do better. Yet the risk pays off so often that the authorities are prepared to play as close to the edge as they can. Even when they are caught out and throw themselves onto the court of public opinion, they still have the upper hand. They are called upon to make decisions that others are reluctant to take to ensure the survival, security, safety, and welfare of their charges for which they have general backing no matter what. They know that most people are in no position to dethrone them unless really riled up and prepared to confront them in an uneven match. They can generally rely on conformity, complacency, tolerance, a forgiving attitude, admiration, and a hard core of dependents to rally in their defence as long as they claim to be maximising the well being of conscious creatures, a prosperous civil society, and an atmosphere of beneficence, trust, and creativity, pursuant of wholesome pleasures (Harris, 2010), even when to outsiders they evidently are not.

There are many current illustrations of this abuse of authority in rogue states and criminal organisations as might be expected. They even occur in countries that should know better given their recent history. For example, Alexey Navalny, a crusader against corruption in Russia, has uncovered criminal self dealing in major oil companies, banks, and government ministries (Ioffe, 2011). He urges his readers on the internet to scrutinise public documents for evidence of malfeasance and post their findings on the web. His work has already led to the cancellation of numerous government contracts and the revelation of substantial kickbacks in preparing for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. His worry as a whistleblower is the lack of transparency in both public and private sectors and warns investors that "Russian power structures are corrupt inside out" (Loiko, 2011, p. A9). He points out that there have been few corruption cases that actually end up in court just as in India where there are few prosecutions and even fewer convictions (Sunder, 2011, p. 248). Public leaders can suggest as many measures as they choose but when the police, the prosecutors and the security services are all involved in covering up for corruption scams, culprits are rarely investigated (Loiko 2011, A9). Pulling the threads together, the harsh conclusion is that corruption in Russia defines public life at every level (Legvold, 2009) and gets worse with its drain on the economy and society (Saunders 2011). Not surprisingly, some two-thirds of Russians consider corruption to be the country's most serious problem (Leonova, 2011).

If the truth be known, as in Russia, public leaders elsewhere in every region around the globe have been notoriously corrupt and their corruption has been accepted as a way of life, justified by them as unavoidable, and accepted by their followers because the

latter have had little choice (Johnston, 2005). The public purse has always been a tempting target for personal benefit. That motive has been one of the attractions of authority and worth the risks and sacrifices involved in pursuing a career that will eventually end up joining the elite of the day and hopefully entrenching one's heirs and close friends also in that position. This has now reached the point that the spread and interconnection of such corrupt and corrupting behaviour is seriously threatening global security and world order, destabilising countries, handicapping global development, widening the gap between rich and poor, undermining moral values, depriving individuals of their fundamental human rights, entrenching rogues and criminals, and blocking good government (Elliott, 1997, Huberts, 2007, Rotberg, 2009).

Is this daunting view justifiable? Is it true that anything goes? By whose rules do people play? On the one hand, the authorities set the rules for everyone else but ignore them if they believe they can get away with that. On the other hand, their followers understand that while they have to appear to obey those rules, they have their own different agendas if they can avoid drawing attention to themselves. This power distance gives rise to conflicting views of how much power holders can be trusted, how much should be left to experts, how much the masses can check on power holders and experts, and whether the suspicion of corruption can ever be erased (Hofstede, 2001).The outcome is largely decided at street level where the authorities should have the advantage although they cannot possibly know what happens at every point of execution where the formal rules may be waived altogether or modified or even sabotaged by conniving front line staff. Ethnomethodology posits that how the rules get interpreted and applied is a matter of mutual negotiation and compromise in which the decisive factor is common sense assumptions based on knowledge and reasoning that are needed to make social life work (Garfinkel, 1967). Things should go well where the participants share common values but where there is wide disagreement and authority has to be imposed, then resentment may eventuate into defiance, disobedience, and vengeance. When violence occurs, offending principals are targeted by mobs unless they can escape in time.

The Moral Dimension of Cultural Corruption

These days, most execution occurs through bureaucratic organisations that endeavour to impose formally standard universal application. It assumes willing compliance within a fairly common culture wherein people share most values. This is not the case in Russia or anywhere else outside those places where there exists a strong will to minimise corruption in public life as evidenced by those countries and societies that have a justifiable consistent reputation for straight dealing, openness, honesty, and other public virtues, such as Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, and Singapore. Impartial attempts by international bodies such as Transparency International and the World Bank to identify countries that are reputed to be the least and the most corrupt respectfully show the prosperous democracies at one end of a good governance scale and

dictatorships and failed states at the other (Heller, 2009, pp. 48-49). Even so, all is not well among the reputed virtuous.

> There is a specter haunting democracy in the world today. It is bad governance—governance that serves only the interests of a narrow ruling elite. Governance that is drenched in corruption, patronage, favouritism, and abuse of power. Governance that is not responding to the massive and long-deferred social agenda of reducing inequality and unemployment and fighting against dehumanising poverty. Governance that is not delivering broad improvement in people's lives because it is stealing, squandering, or skewing the available resources. (Diamond, 2007, p. 119)

Clearly, cultural factors are behind the persistence of other types of corruption (psychological, social, anthropological, political, economic, and administrative) all of which interact and overlap, thereby reinforcing one another as to whether they confound or support anti-corruption campaigns. This makes all the difference between corruption as an inescapable **way** of life and corruption as an incidental **fact** of life that can be contained.

Moralists have always preached that public leaders if so minded can at any time choose to end the rotten systems they inherit and set the example of how things could (and should) be run and put into place a governance system that would not tolerate dirty hands by which is meant authority that breaches expected public morality (Dwivedi, 1987). Most holy books detail similar systems of good governance that could be adopted and insist that public leaders should be held to a higher moral standard than that of their followers. Throughout human history, there have been rulers who met this challenge, resisted the temptation to rule in their own self-interest, vowed to eliminate corrupt practices, and prosecuted officials who failed to live up to the ethical code expected of them. Their number has probably increased over the past one hundred or so years as government has become more representative. Official codes of ethics have been adopted, respected, and enforced. Professional career public servants have refrained from improper behaviour and have disciplined their colleagues who have been discovered besmirching their profession. It is universally understood that as moral leadership is crucial for tackling the challenges of the time, more studies are being undertaken to improve leadership and developing future leaders who are expected to make a difference (Fairholm, 2011) and to ensure greater standards of personal integrity.

Yet despite these efforts corrupt officials can be found throughout governance in many, if not all countries (Garfinkel, 1967, Johnston, 2008, Quah, 2011). Corrupt practices persist because the people with whom they deal still stick informally to age old attitudes and practices and resist changing their ways. Members of the public stay loyal to proven crooks and thieves in public office. People accede to the succession of the rulers' unproven relatives, cooperate with organized criminals, take poorly paid

positions to make a living through bribes and bribe others to give them favours in return, and seek to gain access to patrons who can advance them. For these, corruption is common sport. Whistle-blowing is considered a breach of comradeship and harmony likely to provoke retribution. To outward appearances nothing appears untoward but closer inspection reveals that things are not at all what they ought to be. Informal deals are being made not to appear to be alienating, offensive, unkind, unreasonable, unduly harsh or vindictive but to make life easier, decisions more acceptable, relations more pleasant, and generally soften relations between the authorities and their charges, the rulers and the ruled. This is ethnomethodology at work deeply embedded in the prevailing culture. "Corruption requires not only complicity and trust, ...but also shared knowledge, a shared language; even those who choose not to 'play the game'... nonetheless know its rules and its stakes" (Zinn, 2005, pp. 233).

The situation is complicated when people employ fixers to "facilitate speedy completion of transactions or undue priorities, or refrain from taking due processes against interested applicants for pecuniary gain or any favour, advantage, or consideration" (Zelekha and Werner, 2011, pp. 617) for a host of reasons that enable them to get a better deal. At first, the use of fixers may appear to be innocent, innocuous, trivial, and mutually helpful but this situation can quickly become institutionalised and prevent reforms when operated by syndicates protected by law to grease the operations of governance to help their clients lost in the bureaucratic maze or dissatisfied with the service they receive. These fixers who resemble lobbyists can be insiders and retired insiders who know their way around and can guarantee a favourable outcome, or outsiders who get results through their mediation and influence and professional lobbyists who act on behalf of their clients whenever something big is in the offing (ibid, pp. 625-6).

Moralists worry about these informal deals. They would much prefer openness, the sunshine that would expose wrongdoing, discrimination, irregularities, lapses of integrity, and departures from virtue, honesty, trustworthiness and straight dealing. They do not expect perfection; they allow for slight transgressions that are relatively harmless, undertaken for good cause, and generally beneficial. So, minor corruption can be overlooked. Major offenders should be exposed and made to pay appropriately if only as a warning to others who might be tempted to copy their poor example. The offenders are of course the corrupt who roughly know how far they can go before being exposed and subjected to public disapproval. They bluff their way out for they are savvy at justifying themselves, covering their traces, and scaring off truth seekers. Unfortunately, they become so adept that they get convinced of their own infallibility and contemptuous of being caught out. They even get so brazen that they parade their misconduct to show how powerful they are and how weak everyone else is. They come to believe that anyone in their position would do much the same given the chance. After all, most others are probably just envious or unqualified or less competent, altogether

untalented and undeserving (Rand, 1947, 2005). There ought to be some compensation for undertaking public responsibilities. So why not take advantage of one's position? Every decade seems to offer variations and additions on this theme. The ingenious still find ways of evading detection.

How far do people with dirty hands reach? Scandals reveal that there is no limit. In all walks of life, the corrupt rise to the apex, and the higher they go, the more damage they can do and the more power they can employ to hide their past misdeeds and justify their current misdeeds. They have their mentors, collaborators, stooges, henchmen, and enforcers who leave many innocent victims in their wake (Porta and Vannucci, 2012). They show little remorse. Indeed, they are proud of their accomplishments and their gall can be incredulous. They have no regrets. They make sure that history records their side of the story as told by their devoted believers regardless of the facts. For instance, in the Soviet Union under Stalin,

> There was room... for altruism, generosity, nobility even, but the capricious arbitrariness of the regime left even more room for cruelty and corruption. Worst of all was the terrifying fear and insecurity felt viscerally at all levels of society... you sensed an invisible trapdoor beneath your feet that might yawn open at any moment and drop you into an inferno from which there was usually no escape... you could be arbitrarily arrested, beaten, shot, or starved to death, or condemned to a life of slavery, and no one could escape the risk (Scammell, 2011, p. 48).

The Soviet Union although extreme unfortunately has not been that exceptional among the blackest regimes. Even in the most reputable regimes there are occasions when leaders with dirty hands are exonerated, celebrated, and revered. People with social standing expect preference and deference and to be given the benefit of any doubt. But people without much status also try to get favourable treatment by fair means or foul. This seems instinctive to human nature like the inner drive to succeed that pits one person against another. Where one person may see this as part of life's struggle, another may view the same behaviour as being unfair and unscrupulous. One person may view accumulating wealth as a just reward for providing livelihoods to others while another may see making money as the root of all evil and a diversion from the real purpose of living the good life. The former excuses and justifies what the latter considers unfair and immoral (Skidelsky, 2011). This dilemma arises from relating the dimension of cultural corruption to the broader moral landscape that the mainstream of research on corruption has too often conveniently evaded. When too many different forms of corruption are bundled together, it becomes quite difficult to sort out trends and separate one from another whereas concentrating on specific corrupt practices simplifies analysis. The latter may provide practical concrete technical solutions and remedies but they may only drive corruption elsewhere.

The Taint of Corruption

That many academic approaches to corruption slide around its immorality has been criticised because in the popular mind it is associated with evil, decadence, degeneracy, and decay.

> Corruption is more than illegality, breach of duty, betrayal, secrecy, inequality, the subversion of the public interest, and inefficiency, whether those elements are considered alone or together... although all of these theories indentify elements that are often important characteristics of corrupt acts... they are not, alone or in combination, all that compose the corrupt core... [It] is evidence of a moral "virus" or "cancer", an infestation of "evil", all of which often seems to have religious roots... [It] expresses the transgression of some deeply held and asserted universal norm... it presents a vital threat to the larger societal fabric of which it is part [and] challenges the existing order. It substitutes personal self-seeking, family or clan loyalties, or other parochial goals and loyalties for larger societal identification and societal goals... it is a repudiation of the idea that a fabric of shared values is necessary to undergird societies and governments. (Underkuffler, 2009, pp. 37-9)

Because the standard prescriptions for combating corruption avoid moral content and the erosion of moral values, they may fail to grasp the complete root of the problem or critical pieces of the possible solution. They "may also fail to express the urgency of the situation where a country is battling systemic corruption" (ibid, p. 41). On the other hand, in exaggerating the evil of corruption, zealousness could be overdone Although it is destructive of societies, viewing it "in emotionally evocative and cataclysmic terms may propel it to a status of 'universally causative evil' that is ill-deserved" (ibid, p. 41). At its core, it is deeply emotional and loathsome, threatening and fraught with violence and chaos (Cox, 2008).

Cultural corruption is about what behaviours are considered at individual, organisational, and societal levels to constitute misconduct. What is cultural are the "goals, values and worldviews that are manifest in a specific community's speeches, laws, and routine practices as well as the community's particular way of life" (Shweder, 2000, p. 163). By value is meant "a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of a desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action" (Kluckhohn et al., 1951, p. 395). Hence, cultural values are "those conceptions of the desirable that are characteristic of a particular people" (Husted, 1999, p. 341). Sometimes, there is a broad consensus worldwide but other times there are quite wide differences of opinion about basic values among different societies and their smaller communities, and certainly among individuals. When it comes to corruption, some forms are universally condemned while others are disputed as being just the way public business is conducted in a particular

society and seemingly acceptable by its members because they have little choice other than to go along with the pressure exerted by authorities and peers.

What is most disconcerting is that in some parts of the world, the conservative and reactionary traditions that linger due to ignorance, superstition, and folkways, do not make much sense in the contemporary global society. Visitors from without express their contempt at what they consider are the uncivilised features they observe. They cite, for example, unhygienic personal practices, filth, neglect, witchcraft, tribalism, crime, and cruelty to animals and humans, even cannibalism and slavery (Naipaul, 2010). This situation is compounded by official rapaciousness, kleptocracy, foreign exploitation, local rivalries and hatreds, lawlessness, ubiquitous breakdowns of order, and inordinate waste (Spector, 2012). No wonder corruption is a way of life in such circumstances even without widespread poverty, population pressure, and a robber economy. In such places, even the authorities staffed by Western educated elites echo these observations and admit that things are a mess and work chaotically. Good governance is unknown. Public leaders lack integrity. Civil society barely exists as the inhabitants struggle against widespread iniquity with insecurity, ill-health, illiteracy, poor diets, inadequate public facilities, discrimination, and suppression of human rights. The rot comes from the very top too. Thus,

> Liberation movements captured many African governments. They took control, created one-party states, and followed a philosophy of "I liberated you. You owe me!"... Then came the Cold War, which was at its highest during the fight for independence. It didn't matter if you were a dictator or a thief. If you were an ally, then you were a client state. (Auletta, 2011, p. 49)

Bad local leaders set a poor example for their followers. Their lack of will to clean up makes things even worse by institutionalising kleptocracy and being gossiped about in erotic terms (Miller, 2008).

What Some Recent Research Reveals About Cultural Corruption

Because of the contrast in values and expectations from one place to another and the difficulties and complexities involved in trying to measure even known corruption, generalisations are hard to draw. But some seem to be clear according to the latest research although they only skim over the surface and confine themselves to particular parts of the whole. First, as taboos surrounding the subject are shredded, more is known and discoverable. It indicates that corruption or at least the reporting of corruption seems to be on the increase. Concerns are expressed that individual integrity seems to be declining in the contemporary world. In any event, anti-corruption campaigns are disappointing and of only limited success that fades without persistent vigilance. Second, according to World Value Surveys (WVS) and the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), countries with seemingly lower levels of corruption have higher levels of

trust among their populations and value their children's independence more. In contrast, cultures that stress economic success but restrict access to opportunities have higher levels of corruption. Amoral familism contributes to corruption whereas Protestant countries seem to have less corruption (Lipset and Lenz, 2000, pp. 116-122). Otherwise, cultural control variables, such as ethno-linguistic fractionalisation, Protestantism, and colonial heritage give some pointers (Yadav, 2011) but these are indistinct and pale in comparison with other causes of corruption (Treisman, 2000).

Other data found that (a) the greater the distance between rulers and ruled, the higher the level of corruption as questionable business practices would be more acceptable to high-power distance cultures, (b) the more collectivistic society, the higher the level of corruption, (c) the greater the masculinity of a culture, the higher the level of corruption, and (d) the greater the level of uncertainty avoidance in a country, the higher the level of corruption (Husted, 1999, p. 345). What role did trust and religion play in curbing corruption? It was found that trust made for a lower level of corruption because officials and citizens cooperated much better in fighting corruption (La Porta et al, 1997, 336-7), that the more hierarchical religions hindered civic engagement as a deterrent to corruption, but once per capita income was taken into account, there was a much weaker correlation (Lambsdorff , 2006, 18), and that democracy, implying a democratic ethos, only mitigated against corruption by allowing the electorate to vote the rascals out of office (Drury, Krieckhaus, and Lusztig, 2006) without preventing another set of rascals replacing them.

Generalisations like these are scattered throughout the research and contradictions can be found in tables relating corruption to cultural indicators and variables (Hofstede, 2001, Larmour, 2012). The explanation is partly methodological but also reveals much confusion over what is or should be studied or what should be the main focus of the study (Banuri and Eckel, 2012).

Then the situation becomes murkier. One observer has explained corruption in terms of "national mentality" (Glinkina, 1998). Another has attributed Asian corruption to family relationships, central imposition, and low respect for the letter of the law, dating back to feudalism (Holmes 2006, p. 179), while others attribute the same causes to cronyism in government-business relations (Perkins, 2000, p. 233) and to gift-giving (Larmour,2008, p. 226). But are cultural practices used as the excuse for corruption rather than its cause (Alatas, 1968)? A founder of Transparency International, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, protested "I shudder at how an integral aspect of our culture could be taken as the basis for rationalising otherwise despicable behaviour" (Transparency International, 2000, p. 9). This sentiment expresses the fear that "it would clearly be politically undesirable to delimit moral relativism to the point that it becomes an excuse or justification for corruption" (Zinn, 2005, p.232). Culture has been blamed simply because no other explanation can be found or because it undermines universal comparison.

Yet, ideas about blaming culture will not go away as long as countries refer to their heritage to defy universalistic values and where universalists defer to or at least accommodate claims of national difference (Larmour 2008, p. 226). But "Culture can only explain a certain fraction of the level of corruption and there remains sufficient room for improvement of a country's integrity" (Lambsdorff 1999, p. 2). This assertion makes sense when the correlation between failed and failing states and their high levels of corruption is obvious, ever since *Foreign Policy* and the Fund for Peace began publishing their index in 2005. The same group of countries remains unstable and low on quality of everyday life, plagued by lawlessness and chaos, with illegitimate governments, impoverished economies, inadequate and insufficient public services, extremes of inequality, and excessive capital outflows and brain drain. Judith Tendler has sketched this typical image of poor governance portrayed in international circles:

> Public officials and their workers pursue their own private interests rather than those of the public good. Governments overextend themselves in hiring and spending. Clientelism runs rampant, with workers being hired and fired on the basis of kinship and political loyalty rather than merit. Workers are poorly trained and receive little on-the-job training. Badly conceived programmes and policies create myriad opportunities for bribery, influence peddling, and other forms of malfeasance. All this adds up to the disappointing inability of many governments to deliver good public services and to cope with persistent problems of corruption, poverty, and macroeconomic management. (Tendler, 1997, p. 1)

Despite international attempts over the past decade, not much has changed from this grim picture in most failing states (Patrick, 2011, Traub, 2011). Successful reforms have been few. Progress has been slow. Meanwhile, the situation elsewhere has continued if anything to deteriorate to the extent where more victims of corruption have awakened and begun to take action on their own to challenge corrupt regimes, threaten revolution, and resort to violent demonstrations. They believe that unless they do, nobody will take much notice and the authorities will change little if anything as long as they possess the iron glove. Once threatened and once they acknowledge that their agents are beginning to shift sides in identifying with the mob, self-preservation should prompt them to act in common cause until the danger subsides.

Restricted View of the Nature of Cultural Corruption

If one assumes that corruption is widespread and seems inevitable, that people cannot be expected to behave themselves at all times, that it is nigh impossible to grasp the amount that occurs or its scope and variations over time or successes and failures in containing it, a more useful (utilitarian) approach to the phenomenon is to concentrate on its possible sources and limit its scope to the public or official organisations and to narrow it down further to plunder of the public purse, bribery, kickbacks, and

enrichment in public office. The common understanding of corruption is that it consists of dishonest, deceitful, and unfair practices irrespective of culture and there has been much agreement in identifying such wrongdoing without delving into its cultural milieu although it deviates from norms incumbent upon all. This is understandable because the same dishonest, deceitful, and unfair practices are found everywhere and remain much the same from time immemorial whether considered minor, petty, usual, commonplace, expected, and unreported, or grossly abusive, cruel, vindictive, treacherous, destabilising, and bringing massive calculated death and destruction.

Consequently, the major focus in research on corruption has been more on the dishonest practices of public officials conveniently adopting the definition of the United Nations Development Programme as "the misuse of public power, office, or authority for private benefit— through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement" (UNDP, 1999, p. 7), largely following Nye (1967, p. 419). This narrow definition concentrates on individuals who stray from official norms, not their organisations that may be systemically corrupt where wrongdoing has become the norm and the standard accepted behaviour to accomplish organisational goals and where notions of public responsibility and trust have become the exception not the rule (Caiden and Caiden, 1977, p. 306). It excludes many forms of wrongdoing that do not involve money and individuals who do not hold office in order to exploit office, promise to misuse office in the future, and seek not personal gain but to enhance the status, reputation, influence, benefits, and the ability to grant favours of the bodies they represent (Yadav, 2011, p. 3).

More significantly, the narrow definition ignores the grosser forms of societal corruption and systemic global corruption. It does not quite cover the dishonest practices of private and non-governmental organisations such as business lobbies, trade associations, think tanks, law firms, and political parties, the magnitude of corrupt activities, and the presence of informal rules and practices that regularise and inform wrongdoing. Such norms are neither codified nor externally enforced although they "powerfully shape the interests and strategies of public officials and citizens" (Stephes, 2007, pp. 6-7). Nor does it deal with a basis of corruption that allows kleptocracy, i.e. governance by greed where authorities have little intention of following their own laws. Sheltering under extreme partisanship and selfishness, individuals and organisations try to get away with what they can although unlike the kleptocrats they may still accept legal and social norms and expect to be punished if caught. Much more serious is where authorities encourage corruption and have little concern about punishment or guilt feelings which has a corrosive effect on governance and "leads to a culture of acceptance of corruption" (White, 2001, p. 45). Rules and norms are irrelevant as to how authorities and people actually behave and to expectations of how they ought to behave. Thus, in black (evil in contrast to white which is pure) regimes and failed states anything goes limited only by the extent of resistance by its victims if at all. They are "ungoverned spaces" (Traub, 2011, p. 52) and "a threat to their own inhabitants"

(Patrick, 2011, pp. 55).

Stretching corruption wider and wider from official misconduct to societies where chaos and anarchy prevail, where there are no common norms and rules, where no single authority imposes any order, where any and all misconduct is included, creates intellectual difficulties. This is best seen in one of the latest studies by a cast of world experts who try to place the phenomenon of corruption in context and cover the whole spectrum in the aptly entitled *The Good Cause* (Graaf, Maravic, and Wagenaar, 2010). Its assumes that by "understanding how different theories define, conceptualise, and eventually deduce policy recommendations amplifies the complexity of corruption"(p. 15). It identifies eight different approaches:

1. *Weberian-idealtypical* which sees corruption as a lack of rationality on the route from patrimonialism to rational legal authority such that loopholes exist in the incomplete bureaucratic system for corruption to occur;

2. *Structural functionalist* which sees society as a collection of interlocking coherent systems that have their function wherein corruption also has its place as facilitating action by greasing governance operations;

3. *Institutional economics* which sees the corrupt as rational utility maximisers who take the most profitable course to further their own self-interest in a world of scarcity. All organisations are vulnerable to exploitation by the unscrupulous;

4. *Systems theory* sees society divided into separate, self-referential autopoietic value systems that when overlapping cause corruption when the penetrating values of one system abuse another system's logic;

5. *Institutional design* believes that as institutions shape behaviour, some governance systems are more prone to corruption than others and it seeks to explore disparate causal mechanisms between rival systems.

6. *Ecological* involves combining micro, meso, and macro levels of corruption research into a comprehensive model;

7. *Post-positivist* focuses on how corruption is socially constructed within a society's contested system of public order, of a public role or resource for private benefit (Johnston, 1996, p. 322). As the meaning of deviancy varies in time and place, empirical research is required to understand the subjective perspective of reality.

8. *Criminological* draws attention to the importance of the psychological make-up of the perpetrators of corruption whose results-oriented mode of operation makes them cross the line between laudable and lamentable behaviour.

Valiantly, Leo Huberts attempts to put all these together in his comprehensive *multi* approach in which he simplified "corruption as the abuse of a (public) authority for private benefit" (p.148) with its multi-level causation and eclectic mapping of factors making for corruption (pp. 146-165). The word "culture" appears at the macro (societal), meso (organisational), and micro (individual) levels related to values and moral judgment (p. 146) and by implication integrity, but this is not elaborated, presumably already well known to researchers

Considerably more was elaborated in another recent comparative study of corruption in selected Asian countries (Quah, 2011) which did pay special attention to its cultural side as had Myrdal's pioneer study of poverty in Asia (Myrdal, 1968), both studies employing a broader definition of culture (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86). They reveal wide contrasts between and within neighbouring countries as to how they define corruption, the policy context in which it occurs, the extent to which it flourishes as far as that can be ascertained, the prevailing societal tolerance and cultural supports for its presence, the probability of detection and punishment, and the effectiveness of measures taken to contain it. Even though Quah's study is confined to ten selected countries in Asia, it has much wider universal significance as some features in all of them can be found somewhere around the globe, demonstrating how and why people fail to live up to their avowed values and ideals, how and why people indulge in corrupt activities when they instinctively know what they do is immoral, and why they accept certain kinds of corruption but not others. Much depends on the context or ecology of public life, the participants, and the time as everything is in a state of flux. There is no common Asian corruption. Generalisation is almost impossible. Simple answers are beguiling but the truth is much more complex and puzzling to discern.

For example, throughout the world, gift giving is a feature of reciprocity in social relations as a means of showing respect, as evidence of good will and reciprocity, as a way of receiving better treatment or attaining a mutual benefit, certainly not seen as harming anybody. As such, it is perfectly acceptable until it slides into bribery for unfair consideration, special access and favours, undeserved beneficial treatment, evasion of the law, regulations, codes of conduct, and social norms, pampering superiors, and personal advancement and enrichment. In Singapore, but not in Taiwan, it is discouraged and officially outlawed. In contrast, as in Thailand, Indonesia, and Mongolia, where anything goes that advances the interests of oneself and family, promotes one into a privileged elite, provides debts of gratitude, and solidifies the elite, it is a way of life dividing the haves from the have-nots. In Japan, it constitutes structural corruption (*kozo oshoku*), that includes the black mist that governs politics in the private not public interest, the collusion between politicians, officialdom, and business (including the penetration of the *yakuza* into governance), the revolving door practices (*umakudari* and *amakudari*), bureaucratic bid-rigging, lack of financial transparency, and lavish entertainments at high not low levels. In India, gift giving has become institutionalised bribery as a way of life in obtaining any service but much

depends on the locality as the practice varies from the gross to the puritanical. In the Philippines, it is bound up with family obligations, the accepted use of intermediaries to deal with authority (*compadre*), and debts of gratitude (*utang na loob*) for favours rendered, all of which entrench networks, nepotism, speed money, indebtedness to authority, and the privatisation of public values. In short, gift-giving can be a perfectly harmless custom or it can become divisive with sinister implications for the whole society.

These dysfunctional aspects of gift giving are further highlighted in the most recent detailed studies of corruption at work. One largely focuses on corrupt exchanges in Italy (Porta and Vannucci, 2012). The other is based on the author's experience uncovering the roots of corruption (defined as wealth-seeking power and power-seeking-wealth), designing strategies to reduce its vulnerabilities, and assisting governments implementing anti-corruption programmes with detailed studies of the Ukraine, Senegal, Honduras, and Timor Leste (Spector, 2012). Invariably, both venture into what values and ideals (such as survival, security, and safety) override and justify corrupt practices and the issues of what to do about sleaze, class distinctions, religious disputes, basic human rights, and evil doing.

The first study concentrates on bribery, not just the incentives to the participants and their institutional opportunities to gain but also "the differences in cultural traditions, social norms, and interiorised values that inform moral preferences and role consideration" that push individuals toward corruption which constitute its moral costs "as reflected in the esprit de corps and the 'public spiritedness' of officials, the political and civic culture, the political identity and 'moral quality' of the political class , the public's attitudes toward illegality, and business ethics" (Porta and Vannucci, 2012, pp.12-13). The authors present four models depending on the frequency of corrupt exchanges and the amount of potential benefit that range from the petty, individual, structural, and systematic (ibid., pp. 38-39). They devote only a few pages to comparing national cultures. Instead, they concentrate on how corrupt exchanges work, their relationship with organised crime and lawlessness, and the snowball effects of corrupt networks which adapt to changing circumstances. All four models have to be tackled differently and the authors hint how this might be done with examples of specific measures (ibid., p. 264).

> No straightforward formula, no optimal set of norms, institutions or policies, with well-defined timing and content, can be generally applied as a parameter for the evaluation of policies against bribery. Every society, organisation, and decision-making process should find its own elusive amalgam of measures and tools, calibrated on a case-by-case basis to an array of contingent factors. Despite its intrinsic difficulties and potential failures, the fight against corruption encompasses a fundamental symbolic value in itself. (ibid. p. 267).

The second study is bolder and much more persistent in its moral condemnation of corruption in general. It too stresses that anti-corruption interventions should be country specific to be sustainable for otherwise they are prone to backsliding and recorruption (Spector, 2012, p. 12). Too much is expected of them simply because they take a long time to take effect. Not the symptoms have to be attacked but their underlying dynamics. The mistake of the first generation (1990s) of international anti-corruption programmes focused on measuring to shame offenders into action. The second generation (2000s) intended to produce institutional reforms and build public awareness had disappointing localised results when embedded corrupt stakeholders reverted to their previous ways. The current wave proposes sophisticated research into the underlying causes of corruption by detectives. Moving too fast may be too disruptive by replacing corrupt systems that work with incorrupt systems that do not. The value of this study is in its comprehensive practical diagnostic tools. If neglected, corruption will continue to wreak its havoc, hurt, and hinder economic, political, and social development.

One of the most perceptive surveys of the current state of the art in relating corruption to culture is that of Peter Larmour based on his extensive work in the Pacific Islands. He probably delves deepest into the intricacies of the subject as his analysis is not just confined to this area but has universal implications (Larmour, 2012). He points out many of the pitfalls that have to be encountered and verifies many of the complexities and contradictions that await the unwary and again confirms that corruption is, like all politics, local. Different groups of people view corruption quite differently reflecting their different worldviews especially "between elites and ordinary people" (p.152). They live with it as best they can in the circumstances. He specifically asked about the cultural aspects of corruption and about how locals interpreted the term "to amplify their indigenous ways of life rather than abandon them" (p. 132). They doubted whether international proposals to reduce corruption would work as they did elsewhere because the locals would operate to fit into their traditional practices, thereby further institutionalising rather than changing them by manipulation. Some things may well be inevitably or unavoidably corrupt. To illustrate this conclusion, one has to return to his previously articulated cycle of cultural corruption (Larmour, 2008).

The Cycle of Cultural Corruption

Larmour's research on gift-giving in Pacific Islands and elsewhere presents a likely cycle of cultural corruption. The following relevant entry points were identified: general suspicion of corruption, identification of particular behaviour or individual as corrupt, seriousness with which corruption is taken, people's willingness to criticise and report corruption, how authorities mete out judgment on corrupt behaviour, implementation of decision, and punishment (Larmour, 2008, pp. 231-4). The whole cycle illustrates how difficult it is to separate the cultural from the structural and institutional.

1. General suspicion of corruption

General suspicion may not be based on evidence but results from secrecy and the government's grip on power. Where transparency is absent and trust is confined only to a small circle of insiders, suspicion of wrong-doing is hard to shake off. This contrasts with generalised trust in the authorities associated with effective government, open government, low crime rates, and economic growth (Uslaner, 2005, p. 77) where people are prepared to give office holders the benefit of the doubt. Although nobody may act, a suspicious culture can eventually lead to a "rotting fish" effect wherein "you live in a society where everybody steals. Do you choose to steal" The probability of being caught is low "Therefore, you too steal" (Mauro, 1998). People really have to trust their institutions, most of all the quality of their governance, their confidence in what it delivers, its decent and fair treatment of its clients, its reliability and dependability, its legitimacy, its ability to protect them from risk, and its promotion of social trust (Rothstein, 2011). Social mistrust breeds suspicion of corruption that can readily be confirmed in daily experience at the hands of other people. In short, where there is smoke, there is likely to be fire. Stories about perceived corruption are legion almost everywhere although they may be figments of the imagination.

2. Identification as being corrupt

People consider whether a particular act or actor is corrupt or not (Larmour, 2008, p. 231). Identification is a social event rather than a solitary decision.

> It involves language, and in practice is likely to involve the to-ing and fro-ing of discussion with colleagues or friends or family (or some kind of internal dialogue reproducing these interactions). This process may refer to what others have done before, or would do — and involve role models, childhood injunctions, and the examples set by characters in folktales or film (ibid., p. 231-2).

Thus, gift-giving in Kiribati to public officials with the sole intention of showing respect is acceptable practice according to local custom and is not seen as corruption. Historically, the ritualised exchange of gifts has symbolised sharing, hospitality, friendship, trust, charity, and alliance (Taylor, 2001, p. 96). Drawing a line between gifts and bribes as in Kazakhstan involves recognising contradictory standards that coexist depending on content, status of recipient, motive and transparency of the exchange, and moral and legal definition of the exchange (Werner, 2000).

Elsewhere, as in Singapore, gift-giving to public officials is prohibited. It is seen as an attempt to curry unfair advantage or favour. The acceptance of gifts is also prohibited as a dereliction of duty and too much of a temptation to misuse authority and sway discretion. Furthermore, too much gift-giving may be too much of a good thing as

in Japan where it can viewed as being inappropriate where it goes well beyond just buying preferential treatment from public officials to reinforcing networks (*jinmyaku*) generating reciprocal relationships between the giver and the receiver already entrenched through other social relationships (marriage, education, party affiliation) that create an fairly informal homogeneous policy elite (Choi, 2007, p. 933). The gifts come in all kinds of forms that solidify cronyism, aristocracy, kleptocracy, and inequality.

3. Seriousness

No anti-corruption effort can succeed without strong political and public support. The seriousness with which corruption is taken is crucial as seriousness corresponds to moral pressure brought on corrupt public officials and aids on the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of anti-corruption efforts. But where corruption is widely suspected and assumed, where many problematic practices are tolerated as daily routines, and where much of the public is excluded from public policy making and responsible government, it is unlikely that corruption will be taken seriously because there is little oversight and public involvement. This is where power distance, interpersonal trust, relationship with authority, emphasis on personal moral obligations, and conflict resolution really count and involve transformations in both state and society (Abel and Gupta, 2002).

4. Willingness to criticise and report

Cultures which attach great importance to interpersonal relationships label as betrayal behaviour endangering such relationships or harming the material and reputational welfare of superiors, family members, business associates, friends, and workmates. There is an effective vow of silence in which nobody rats on another. Everybody turns a blind eye at corrupt practices and wrong-doing (Schuster, 2004, 9) and nobody reports another's misconduct lest it bring "shame to the family involved, damage to the social fabric, and the breaking of relationships" (James and Tufui, 2004, p. 10). These cultural values make it more difficult to disclose and curb corrupt practices. Rarely does only one person act alone and able to hide the corruption that is being perpetrated. Others must know and yet they keep their knowledge to themselves. The corrupt rely on their silence or complicity that turns corruption into crime (Rosoff, Pontell, and Tillman, 2003).

5. Authoritative judgments

Tampering with judgmental decisions is a time honored practice very much influenced by culture where the status, wealth, marital condition, or sex of a client counts. The weaker sex, the poor and underprivileged are at a distinct disadvantage as are strangers and outsiders. This is particularly true where discretion rules and the law is unclear. All is subject to interpretation which brings in custom and tradition in

deciding what is or is not considered corruption or harmful enough to be taken seriously (Taafaki, 2004, p. 15). The victims of misconduct can expect little if any consideration and no fair hearing. No stain attaches to the accused who are vindicated of all wrong-doing. Thus, corruption is perpetuated and even institutionalised as normal behaviour.

6. Implementation of authoritative decisions

Judgment is tempered by mercy, sometimes in outrageous ways when the guilty are let off with a mere reprimand or a promise to compensate any proven victims in what may be viewed as a victimless crime. It is good to have friends in high places or to be a celebrity or to be so esteemed for previous acts of courage, leadership, and charity that one's misconduct is overlooked or forgiven. When sufficient time has expired and memories have faded, implementation can be relaxed and the guilty handsomely compensated for taking the blame on themselves and not revealing accomplices or worse offenders. So, authoritative decisions if inconsistent with well accepted cultural values and the way things are usually done are harder to adhere to and effectively carry out. Thus, despite government bans, lavish feasting remains prevalent in top senior official circles in some Asian circles.

7. Punishment/Enforcement

Where insiders are corrupt but can hide their wrong-doing, they are aware that any disclosure will imperil all. They may pick on someone who has fallen out of favour as a warning to others to toe the line. More likely, they are lenient in case they too may fall foul and suffer the consequences that may well entail execution, confiscation of all belongings, and expulsion, just to assuage offended public opinion. But the public also may be lenient when there are no obvious victims (Larmour, 2008, p. 234). Institutionalised corruption may be so entrenched that nobody gets punished at all for responsibility cannot be identified with any specific individual and sanctions are absent or rare where cultural norms preclude punitive denial of perquisites as in Indonesia (Smith 1971). The wrong-doing may be morally offensive but lawful or just on this side of the law well thought out by the most respected professionals in the business to escape prosecution as seems to be much of the case for those responsible for the 2008 global financial crisis and other corporate wrongdoing (Caiden and Caiden ,1977, Caiden, Dwivedi, and Jabbra, 2005, Nocera, 2011, Porter, 2012).

Culturally-Based Incentives

Another approach to explain how culture impacts corruption is to look at culturally-based incentives that drive personal choices. According to Robert Merton, "all social systems set cultural goals — objectives - that human actors seek to achieve, as well as approved means to gain them" (Lipset and Lenz, 2000, p. 117). Social systems press those with few resources to seek the dominant goals such as high income

or social status. Many who have little access to opportunity will reject the rules of the game and try to succeed through unconventional (criminal or innovative) means. Thus, cultures which stress economic success but offer limited opportunities are more likely to encourage corruption, a finding confirmed by World Value Surveys and Corruption Perceptions Index data wherein countries like Russia, South Korea and Turkey with high achievement orientation are reputed to be highly corrupt.

But achievement orientation is counter balanced by a country's ethical system, that is, by the clarity of its ethical norms, the role of authority figures in enforcing those norms, the effectiveness of cultural sanctions, and the tolerance for deviation. Corruption often presents a dilemma between two ethical claims.

> Acting properly is often a matter of reflection and calculation rather than passion — "weighing up". Some of the calculation involves rehearsing how you will explain or justify what you did — if it comes out. But cultural factors may determine the factors that people take into account, and the weighting they give them (Larmour, 2008, p. 234).

Both a culture's influence on public policy and its impact on personal motivation need to be studied. Some aspects are more relevant than others, e.g. power distance, perception of power and willingness to participate in public affairs, ease of detecting corruption, and willingness to report corruption. The general social culture does influence individual decision making, organisational cultures, and investigating suspicion of corrupt practices. Authoritarian cultures are likely to discourage challenging one's superiors, certainly whistleblowing. Likewise, societies dominated by familism are likely to experience nepotism. Four such features are selected for further treatment, namely, power distance, amoral familism, trust, and the distinction between public and private ethics, all of which represent the interface between culture and governance.

1. Power distance

Authoritarianism and totalitarianism probably demonstrate the greatest power distance between rulers and ruled. Lord Acton clearly understood the conflict between religious hierarchy and personal autonomy. Gert Hofstede has updated Lord Acton. Wherever might prevails over right, it is understood that inequality puts all individuals in their place, an order that "satisfies people's need for dependence and gives a sense of security to those in power and to those lower down" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 38). The evil of high power is reflected in the high degree of corruption.

> A desire for status consistency is typical for large power distance cultures. In such cultures the powerful are entitled to privileges, and are expected to use their power to increase their wealth. Their status is enhanced by symbolic behaviour which makes them look as powerful as possible ... Scandals

involving persons in power are expected, and so is the fact that they will be covered up. If something goes wrong, the blame goes to people lower down the hierarchy. If it gets too bad, the way to change the system is by replacing those in power with revolution. Most such revolutions fail even if they succeed, because the newly powerful, after some time, repeat the behaviours of their predecessors, in which they are supported by the prevailing values regarding inequality (ibid., p. 38).

Obviously, power distance results in suspicion of corruption, hesitancy in identifying the corrupt, and leniency in sanctions. It probably also intensifies success orientation by providing incentives for people of lower status to aspire to higher social status in seeking more prestige and privileges. This boils down to a matter of access, who has or does not entrée (Schaffer, 1986).

2. Amoral familism

Amoral familism refers to the mentality that considers it natural to maximize the material, short-run advantages of the family, assuming that all others do likewise (Banfield, 1958, p. 85). It is reflected in (a) lack of interest in the community unless it is in one's personal advantage; (b) officials concern themselves with public affairs because they are paid to do so; (c) checking on officials is the business only of other officials; (d) concerted action is difficult to achieve or maintain; (e) office holders do not identify with the purposes of their organisation and only work no harder than necessary to retain their position; (f) where there is little or no fear of punishment the law will be disregarded; (g) office holders take bribes if they can get away with it; (h) the weak favour a regime that maintains order with a strong hand; (i) inspiration by zeal for public rather than private advantage is regarded as a merely a cover; (j) lack of connection between ideology and concrete behaviour in daily relationships; and (k) whatever group is in power is self-serving and corrupt (ibid. 85-104). In short, social obligations are to family, not to good neighbourliness while public service remains an ideal value rarely realized (Campbell, 1989, p. 336). Amoral familism, as in *amigo* networks, expresses particularism and "gives rise to corruption, and fosters deviance from norms of universalism and merit" (Lipset and Lenz, 2000, p. 120), a point interpreted as the mismanagement of self-interest in patronage and other systems based on personal connections (Rose-Ackerman 1999, 106-108). Even in the highest circles, family (personal rather than public or official or professional) still counts for something in all societies. If one should be in a position to give a helping hand, why not do so? This practice is so obvious in Melanesia where it is expected of the Big Man leading the tribal wantok (Fujuyama, 2011, pp. x-xii).

3. Trust

Generalised trust is universalistic and rests on the foundation of openness rather than personal favouritism or self-interest (Uslaner, 2005, p. 77). In contrast, strategic

trust is based on daily experience with specific people and particularised trust puts faith only in people like oneself. So, low generalised trust coupled with high strategic and particularised trust correlates with more corruption. In-group ties sustain corruption as partners are expected to deliver on their promises to keep their vow of silence which is opposite to generalised trust in the larger society. Organised crime penetration of public affairs operates this way but so do many professional public service insiders too. This is at the heart of patron-client relationships where people seek patronage from strategically positioned kinsfolk, friends and protectors, informal networks of acquaintances who can do favors for one another. But such favours entail obligations to repay "on more or less a *quid pro quo* basis and if not repaid when requested or expected" terminates the relationship (Boissevain, 1989, p. 312). Such networking is possibly the most common form of corruption worldwide. It greases the machinery of governance functioning smoothly and unobtrusively. It strengthens the bonds between rulers and ruled and if this is its aim, it acts advantageously and serves a useful purpose. Social networks fostered by civic associations break down the barriers between bureaucracies and their grassroots clients and promote social stability. In so doing, they aid neglected minorities and others who feel left out in the cold without a voice. But there is no substitute for promoting general social trust in public institutions (Kornai and Rose-Ackerman, 2004, Rothstein, 2011).

4. Public versus private ethics

There is a difference between public roles and private interests. Harshly put,

> In the corrupt state, men locate their values wholly within the private sphere and they use the public sphere only to promote private interests. Not only do some men pursue political office and power to further their own interests, but also most citizens try to use their votes, their support or non-support, to further their own immediate interests. Leaders can then easily play on them with promises and flattery. When in office, leaders are able further to manipulate the populace since citizen attention soon wanders, and promises are forgotten because private interests are relatively easily satisfied... A process then begins which ends by taking all real political power out of the hands of the people... Decisions inevitably go to the most powerful whose private interests win the competition. Public power merely magnifies economic power and social prestige... For privatised politics entails the deliberate refusal to seek for the universal or general, and it is to reject even the attempt to distinguish between subjective private desire and a collectively determined public good. (Shumer, 1979, pp. 9-11)

In contrast, impartial, objective, expert, professional bureaucracy ideally demands a strict distinction between the private and the public. Employees are expected to act without fear or favour, independently and objectively following the official rules of the

game without their personal feelings intervening.

> Although it is desirable that individuals be personally moral and ethical, the [administrative] system is based on a different set of principles from personal morality, One can say that "the success of the constitutional state is founded on its ability to separate the exercise of power from the moral character of the power holder." Besides institutional checks and balances that deter the misuse of power, public morality is grounded in the political culture of a society that consists of common norms and attitudes about appropriate behaviour in the public realm, and these institutional and cultural rules reinforce each other (Karklins, 2005, p. 101).

This separation of public and private morality requires a political culture that comprises "norms and values that are part of what we call civic culture, the bureaucratic ethos, the ethos of public responsibility, and so on" (Kaminski, 2005, p. 83). As the political culture regulates official conduct, "corruption denotes the process of penetration of private criteria into the public domain". It is these public civic norms that set corruption apart from mere personal dishonesty and labels corruption to behaviours otherwise justified by private moral standards. Keeping one's word may be a principle of personal ethics but public ethics requires transparency and full disclosure simply because public leaders, indeed all public employees, are expected to strengthen public respect for public institutions. But this distinction between public and private morality is often blurred in conflicts of interest and too often ignored by those lacking in personal integrity. This failure to separate public from private morality undermines many anti-corruption efforts, including many a brave effort by international aid agencies to reduce its detrimental impacts (Klitgaard, 1990, Spector, 2005).

The Bottom Line

Because so much corruption is embedded in culture, the task of overcoming its harmful effects is indeed daunting. Too often fighting corruption by the playbook (Johnson, 2008, p. 206) fails to appreciate all the complex and complicated cultural elements that sustain corruption. To curb corrupt practices requires a deep appreciation of local community cultures. After all, corruption has plagued societies for thousands of years and is likely to be around for many years to come. There are few easy solutions. The countries that are reputed to be relatively free of corruption, such as Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, and Singapore, have taken decades to build up personal integrity and responsibility and they still fight a constant battle against the corrupt whose inventiveness seems to be boundless. Corruption is rightly or wrongly blamed for many of the ills of society. Universally people resent it even when they do not know its extent, its price, its distortions, and its many victims. Everyone who wants to know can point out incidents of nepotism, patronage, undeserved favours, bribery, falsification, embezzlement, dishonesty, cheating, organised crime, and so many other instances of

corrupt practices in their midst. Corruption is hidden yet it is rare for the evidence to disappear completely just as the corrupt are known if not publicly exposed for what they are, what they do, and how much help they receive.

To put the whole issue into context, there are too many people who gain by corruption or are ambiguous about it because they may lose if it were curbed. For those unable to do anything about corruption and whose voice is drowned out, they have many more important issues more central to their lives to be concerned about from worrying about war to just surviving from day to day in a global society that they do not yet fully comprehend. These victims of corruption, and everyone is a victim whether or not they are aware of it, look to public authorities to take effective action to curb its presence. Far too often it is the lack of personal integrity of those who do know better that blocks progress; they hide behind cultural prejudices that they help to perpetuate. Most galling is the failure of the corrupt and the corrupted to acknowledge their guilt and to have any self-recriminations at all. Indeed, even when they have been found guilty of terrible crimes against humanity or caused so much harm to their many victims, they express no regrets and are proud and boastful of their achievements. They knowingly and intentionally intended to wreck havoc and cause as much damage as they could just like terrorists and murderers. Worse still, is when they are excused and given just a slap on the wrist or a light sentence to resume their misconduct but under better cover this time, knowing how well supported and protected they really are (Guerber, Rajagopalan, and Anand, 2011). This way, corruption is perpetuated and the corrupt get off lightly. Tragically, corruption eventually kills people, its innocent victims, and that is why corruption in all its forms must be taken more seriously than it usually is and needs to be tackled with ceaseless vigilance. As more and more people become aware of its dysfunctions which victimise all, so they may insist that their rulers adopt the many known, workable remedies or at least give them a try. They could begin by looking at themselves and insisting that they improve their own personal integrity, enforcing professional ethics, and restoring public credibility and trust in public institutions, means for which already abound in the anti-corruption literature.

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