

Corruption: A Case Study for Economic Psychopathology (A Case Study for Economic Psychopathology)

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ABSTRACT

Economic crime, social abuse, dilapidation of public funds, vices, perverse behavior, deviant behavior, etc., are among the qualifiers borrowed from criminology and economic psychopathology to describe the phenomenon of corruption.

Corruption, because of its extent and its multidimensional form, has become a global phenomenon. The degree of corruption is now the barometer of the political and economic health of a country. The effects of corruption on the economy, on development and on society are disastrous and seriously threaten the stability of the social system. Beyond its economic aspect, corruption touches practically all spheres of social life. Consequently, like economics, other disciplinary fields (economic psychology, sociology, anthropology, legal sciences, etc.) are dedicated to the study of corruption.

My article aims to explain the phenomenon of corruption from the point of view of economic psychology, a relatively recent scientific field, since the consequences of corruption are not only economic but also psycho-sociological. Values such as merit, fairness, justice, transparency and honesty are being flouted.

1. Introduction

Economic psychopathology is a field of applied economic psychology. It deals with specific and concrete problems such as: tax evasion, the psychopathology of transplantation and economic anxiety.

We present below some definitions of economic psychology and we try to define, later, economic psychopathology.

According to Reynaud (1964) *"economic psychology deals with behavioral questions raised by the expensive management of resources in production, exchange and consumption. It uses the concepts and methods of social psychology and economics, that it synthesizes and exceeds if necessary by discovering original concepts and methods"* (p.07).

He will later present a more explicit definition, stressing that *"economic psychology is at the crossroads of social psychology and political economy. It studies the reciprocal management of material and mental resources for the development of man, to the extent that this development depends on economic activity"* (Reynaud, 1974, p.17).

In the same wake, Wärneryd stipulates that *"economic psychology is none other than the scientific study of human choices when these entail economic consequences, that is to say when they involve the use of scarce resources to satisfy needs"* (as cited in Albou, 1984, p.52).

The history of economic psychology informs us that it finds its origins in social psychology from which it drew its tools, its techniques and its methods, before making the junction with the economy. This merger was inevitable because economic activity is primarily social activity.

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Consequently, it is commonly accepted today that economic psychology is the scientific study of economic behavior.

Economic psychopathology is a recent scientific field whose object is *"the study of economic behavior considered regrettable, condemnable, dangerous or harmful by the generality of the social body"* (Albou, 1984, p.186).

Lassarre & Roland-Lévy (2011) point out that *"sometimes deviant behavior is similar to general phenomena leading to a situation of anomie (absence of norms), for example, we have witnessed a deregulation of economic behavior in former communist countries by the emergence of a capitalist economy, without culture and without learning"* (p.122).

2. Corruption

The 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) , published by Transparency International on January 29, 2019, ranks Algeria 105th out of 180 countries concerned. This index makes it possible to classify countries according to their degrees of corruption, from the least corrupt to the most corrupt, based on the scores obtained in the surveys carried out annually by Transparency International on corruption in the world. In 2018, Denmark is considered to be the least corrupt country (1st rank) and Somalia the most corrupt country (180th rank).

However, it is foreseeable that the ranking of Algeria would continue to fall on the corruption perception index, after the explosion, since the popular dynamics of February 22, 2019, of a series of corruption scandals incriminating businessmen and senior government officials.

Defining corruption is not an easy thing, due to its complexity and multiple dimensions, as illustrated by the following corrupt practices:

- A referee who receives favors from a football team to grant them the victory at the expense of the opposing team.
- A customs officer who receives favors from a businessman and lets his goods pass by reducing his customs fees.
- A candidate for an election who offers favors to voters against their votes.

Nevertheless, Lenglet (2009) was able to synthesize the meaning of corruption in the following definition: *"Corruption is the perversion or the diversion of a process or an interaction with one or more people with the intention, for the corruptor, to obtain particular advantages or prerogatives or, for the corrupt, to obtain a retribution in exchange for his complacency. It generally leads to the personal enrichment of the corrupt or to the enrichment of the corrupting organization (mafia group, company, club, etc.)"*.

The World Bank retains two types of corruption:

- Grand corruption: it is a high level corruption where the political decision-makers creating and applying the laws use their official position to promote their well-being, their status or their personal power.
- Petty corruption: it is bureaucratic corruption in public administration.

Petty corruption is the logical consequence of grand corruption, a kind of pandemic, as long as grand corruption creates the legal environment that facilitates and encourages corruption.

Observations drawn from daily life in Algeria inform us of the extent of the phenomenon of corruption gangrening all the hierarchical levels of the institutions of the State and all the sectors: education, higher education, health, sport, trade, etc.

In the same vein, Olivier De Sardan (1996) emphasizes that *"corruption has become in almost all African countries a routine element of the functioning of administrative or para-administrative apparatus, from top to bottom. As such, corruption is neither marginal, nor sectoralized, nor repressed, it is widespread and trivialized"*.

Some researchers, like Zagainova (2012), speak of "institutionalized corruption" when it is generalized, deeply rooted and that it is often a rule of behavior more than an exception. *"Institutionalized corruption is a whole practices erected in tacit normative rules, consisting in the use by private or public persons of positions of power (authority, capacities, responsibilities, etc.) for the private purpose of acquiring goods, assets, assets, of statutes, etc., but above all of powers of influence (capacities to act and to make act). The main characteristic of institutional corruption is that it is a situated and embedded phenomenon, that is to say that it is inseparable from a cultural, social and state context particular to a given time, during which it could become a rule of behavior "*.

3. Corruption and perversion

After a definitional sketch of the concept of corruption, the question that deserves to be asked is: why should we treat the phenomenon of corruption with an approach pertaining to economic psychopathology?

The aspect of economic psychopathology of the phenomenon of corruption, mentioned by several researchers, mainly referring to the term "perversion", should be mentioned. Rakatomalala (2009) underlines that *"the development of corruption is sometimes partially attributed to perversions of cultural values, when for example the notion of respect or submission to authority is diverted from its objectives"*.

Respect or submission to authority is an organizational principle, but when politicians, elected officials and senior state officials who have been vested with public authority and who are responsible for representing the public interest use it for personal enrichment, we are facing a perversion of a fundamental principle which characterizes organized societies and these deviant behaviors lead to a situation of anomie (absence of norms), which is defined as being a *"situation of social deregulation characterized by the absence or insufficiency of social norms allowing to regulate the activity of individuals"* (Capul, 2004, p.12).

The two figures below show the economic and psychopathological repercussions of corruption:

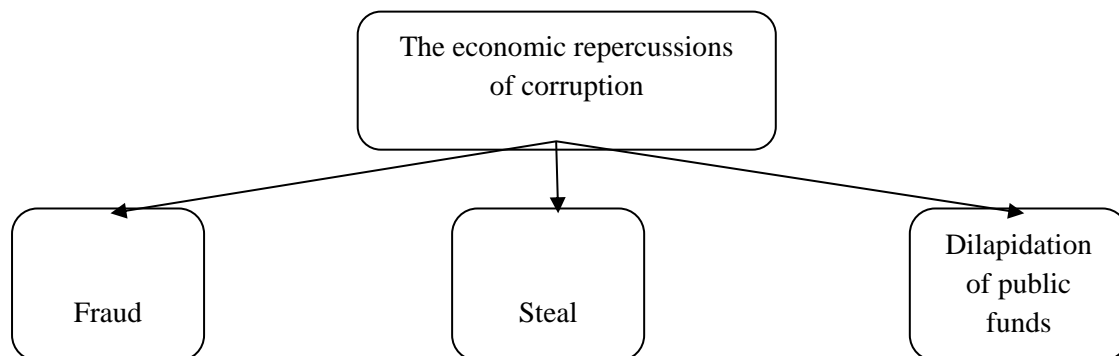


Figure 1. The economic repercussions of corruption (Source: Author)

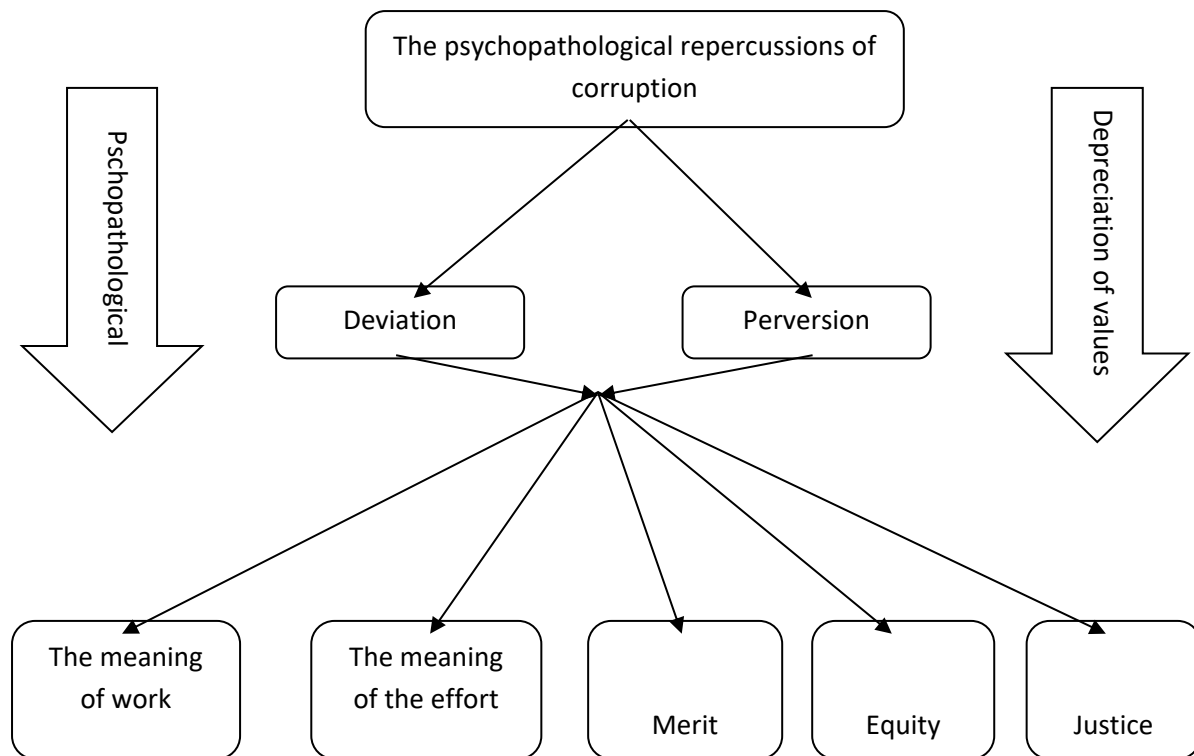


Figure 2. The psychopathological repercussions of corruption (Source: Author)

What we can retain from Figures 1 and 2 above is that corruption, through a psychopathological process and a depreciation of certain values, could lead to anomy. And It is worth remembering that corrupt practices represent a negation of values such as: justice, transparency, fairness, honesty, loyalty and honor.

4. Conclusion

Patricia Moreira (2019), Director of the international secretariat of transparency International, called for a global mobilization against the phenomenon of corruption by saying: *“While many democratic institutions are threatened around the world, we must redouble our efforts to strengthen checks and balances and protect the rights of citizens. Corruption erodes democracy and creates a vicious circle by undermining democratic institutions. In fact, the weaker these institutions, the less they are able to control corruption”*.

The level of corruption is now the barometer of the political and economic health of a country. The effects of corruption on the economy, development and society are disastrous and seriously threaten the stability of the social system.

Fighting corruption is a national and even international priority, it must emanate from a political will, but necessarily accompanied by a citizen watch and everyone is challenged so as not to jeopardize the present and the future of our societies.

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