

# Kakistocracy: Rule of the Unprincipled, Unethical and Unqualified<sup>1</sup>

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Corruption is a betrayal of public trust; kakistocracy is the raging torrent gushing acts of betrayal. Kakistocratic behavior makes corruption intractable and betrayal as an effective tool of the trade. Corruption persists because of the hegemony of kakistocratic leaders in all types of organizations in the Philippines. However, almost all of corruption cases only end up in dragging perfunctory investigations or used as political commodity. They unfortunately fail to elevate into serious intellectual discourse that allow for theoretical abstraction and meaningful insights for reform. This paper digs deeper into the untold middle- and high-level corruption stories from a lens of a betrayal theory for theoretical abstraction, as well as generate meaningful insights for anticorruption initiatives through a citizenship-based country strategy for Mindanao and the Philippines. A concept of citizenship as a countervailing power is juxtaposed to challenge corruption and betrayal. A betrayal theory will look at the various stakes and roles of actors, notions and elements of betrayal, techniques and modus operandi, as well as the pains and struggles of the betrayed through careful case documentation and analysis of their lived experiences.

Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) saw it coming as early as the 1500's when he declared, "What are we in power for?" This was not a question, but a pragmatic pronouncement about the skill of acquisition and utilization of power that leaders ought to learn, perpetuate and protect, by creating what Bolman and Deal (2008) acknowledge as 'overbounded

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systems.<sup>3</sup> Profoundly, Machiavelli's evocation depicts the downfall of many great leaders across the globe – among governments, corporations and even cause-oriented social movements. But more than 400 years later, the English Baron Lord Acton (1834-1902) unleashed his popular dictum against Machiavellian pragmatism: power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The use of cunning and deceitful transactions in politics and society in general, aimed at protecting and propagating vested interests (can be personal interests, class interests, party interests, or business interests) has become a major source of tension as management and leadership theories evolve. The basic tension arises from the lacuna of an operational ethical framework that could have served as one of the firm foundations of effective managerial and leadership styles. This lacuna explains the many controversies and scandals that hound the world's leaders. Thus, there is a need to privilege ethical leadership as an urgent theoretical and practical tool – a kind of ethical leadership philosophy that promotes integrity, credibility, and ascendancy, and that which provides a meaningful normative function for effective managerial and leadership skills.

I strongly adhere to the belief that intelligence without integrity will result in impunity. Without integrity, intelligence and competence will just become effective instruments for undesirable conduct of managers and leaders. On the other hand, integrity without intelligence will simply yield to mediocrity. Mediocre people cannot serve as good and inspiring leaders. Integrity flourishes best when it works with the other ingredients for effective managerial functions and leadership skills. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) in *The Prince of Abyssinia* declared, "Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful."

Leadership without intelligence or integrity gives rise to kakistocracy – a government or organization that is ruled by the most unprincipled, unethical, and unqualified managers and leaders. It comes from the Greek *kakistos* (worst) or *kakos* (bad) + *kracia* (rule, power or government). If unchecked, kakistocracy results in kleptocracy, from the Greek *kleptos*

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<sup>3</sup> Overbounded systems denote concentration, control and monopoly of power, as opposed to underbounded systems where power is diffused and distributed in the organization.

(theft) + *kratos* (rule). Kakistocratic and kleptocratic leadership behavior explains the world's woes in government corruption, citizens' misconduct, corporate scandals, misdemeanour in the Church, anomalies in civil society, spousal indiscretion and infidelity, the desecration of rule of law, and even the persistence of illegitimate authoritarian states and despotic rulers.

The intellectual history of anticorruption movement in the Philippines needs to be written. While the country is replete with innovations and experiences to curb corruption, it has shown a serious lacuna of scholarly discourse and theoretical analysis that will greatly help in elevating the rudimentary into higher discussions. While the anticorruption movement is still making history, it will be greatly influenced by several factors: (1) media reports of public scandals and misconduct; (2) investigative reports published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ); (3) various perception surveys and approval ratings by the Social Weather Stations (SWS), Pulse Asia and Transparency International (TI); and (4) a few academic manuscripts and commissioned publications with grants from donor agencies. Volumes of chronicles and documentaries on the abuses and excesses of the Marcos and Estrada administrations also circulated in the publication industry. But despite these, there is not much model-building efforts, designing of conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and writing of journals, annotated bibliographies and analytical case studies.

In my first book – *Fixing Society* (2007) – I made use of the dark side of social capital as a framework to explain the phenomenon of fixing in the Philippines, as well as explain the collusive networks of fixers inside and outside the Philippine government bureaucracy. The framework was developed based on the experiences of fixers in various government agencies, using various illustrative case studies built and analyzed through years of undercover ethnography. Bureaucratic reforms have been proffered which led to the adoption of anti-red tape and anti-fixing programs in selected government offices.

It is imperative to sustain and scale up the efforts in understanding the intractability of corruption in the country. While much is exposed, much needs to be known. The Philippines has been perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, but it is not wanting of anticorruption reform initiatives. In fact, the country has been recognized by its world-

class anticorruption programs. The problem lies in the fact that crooks and kakistocratic networks are also growing and expanding their insidiousness in form and substance. As anticorruption innovations are designed, new corrupt behaviors and crooked modus operandi are likewise bared. Corruption indeed grows faster than population. Thus, those in the anticorruption movement cannot afford to slacken and extinguish the torch that carries the flame of reform and vigilance. Complacency certainly breeds corruption. In *Investigating Corruption* (2000), Coronel and Kalaw-Tirol warned that "while much more is known about corruption now than in the past, a lot more needs to be found out; unearthing information about corruption is the first step toward preventing it." Relentless efforts with candor, intelligence and integrity are imperatives *sine qua non* – necessary conditions for a country that is struggling in times of deceit and treachery.

In *Betrayal and Betrayers: The Sociology of Treachery* (1991), Malin Akerström made the profound location of betrayal in the private and public spheres and articulated the intimate connection between the betrayal of relationships on one hand and the betrayal of the country on the other. The latter often manifests in issues of corruption and betrayal of public trust. These spheres are the boundaries that shape the bond between and among actors and stakeholders entering into a relationship or social contract. For betrayal to occur, one first has to belong to a boundary. Boundaries are norms which can be anything explicitly and implicitly conceived such as shared values, experiences, information, beliefs, principles, territory, family, organization and in the broader sense, the society and the country as a whole. Thus for Akerström, betrayal is defined as the crossing of boundaries. Breach of trust also means the violation or breach of entrusted boundaries, which make up the so-called fiduciary (entrusted) trust. So for Friedrich (1972), betrayal is indeed a violation of trust.

Akerström showed the profound link upon asserting that betrayal not only consists of treachery toward the country but experiences of betrayal are often entangled in relationships with family and friends. She identified four important features of the concept of boundary: boundedness (setting and milieu), belongingness, sharedness and sacredness (a norm to be honored and respected). Betrayal of trust implies breach of any of the four features.

## Anatomy of betrayal

Betrayal is an adversarial contention and a creeping conflict situation between and among the betrayed and the betrayers. Indirectly involved are the spectators – colleagues, co-employees, friends and other stakeholders – who are constrained by neutrality, acquiescence, self-preservation or simply by their position as disinterested party (no direct stakes or involvement in the betrayal situation). Akerström described these constraints as the predicament of middle positions. This is how the players and stakeholders are located and related in the various case studies. Their behavior is greatly influenced by their location and intensity as the betrayal situation unfolds. Wittingly or unwittingly – deliberately, or not – spectators' behavior has a way of reinforcing the betrayal perpetuated by the betrayer upon the betrayed. The case studies have proven that inaction and neutrality of middle positions unfortunately encourage the unfolding betrayal. Middle-positions are also a form of betrayal when specially exercised with self-preservation motives (Akerström 1991).

There are several acts – or forms – of betrayal that transpired and explicated by various sources in the case studies of this paper: buck-passing; doublespeak; extortion; relocation; reprisal; workplace mobbing; negligence; fall guy; scapegoating; leakage; battering; infidelity and philandering; and abandonment.

Buck-passing aims to evade responsibility and parry the blame for self-preservation, even at the expense of other people. Doublespeak or doubletalk is a deliberate, calculated misuse and distortion of language with the intention to mislead, pretend, avoid responsibility and accountability, conceal one's intentions or agenda, give false hopes, and even commit fraudulence and corruption. Relocation is a euphemism for removal or elimination of someone who gets in the way. It comes in different derivatives – reassignment, floatation, rotation, exile posting, constructive termination or preemptive promotion. Reprisal is for retaliation against legitimate whistleblowers. Workplace mobbing is the systematic and malicious attempt by superiors, co-workers or subordinates to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse and terror. It also comes in various derivatives such as bullying, mistreatment, pressure, emotional abuse and incivility.

Negligence suggests carelessness and disregard. A scapegoat and fall guy refer to a person who is easily or conveniently blamed or accused to divert attention away from the real culprits or problems. Leakage is the process of diversion that causes deprivation. Battering is beating (often wife beating) while infidelity and philandering all connote spousal unfaithfulness (often committed by men). Abandonment occurs as a result of deserting or leaving behind one's duty to family and children, support to friends and even professional obligation.

### **Bearing with betrayal**

How do the players conduct themselves in a betrayal situation? The betrayers behave with impunity as they make use of the power inherent in their position (formal) or temerity (informal) to betray. I believe that deliberate betrayal – or intentional betrayal in Reina and Reina (1999) – committed by betrayers is an abuse of power. The abuse becomes more repulsive when done on somebody who is in a weaker position to defend. This is the reason why betrayal is almost often committed by those who are positionally, physically, or emotionally advantaged.

Logically, the betrayed always feel intensely hurt (Akerström 1991) and demonstrate deep emotions such as indignation, contempt, and revenge (Bateson 1977 as cited in Akerström 1991). As shown by the various experiences of the betrayed in the case studies, this is part of a whole package of behavioral coping mechanism known as bureausis in response to a bureaupathic environment that encourages and sustains betrayal in organizational context (Thompson 1968).

Bureaupathy results in aloofness of people, mechanical relationships brought about by the strict norms of formality and impersonality, repression of personal interest and informal associations, bureaucratic layers (often overlapping or disintegrated), difficulty to move around, displacement of goals, delays in transactions (red tape), and oftentimes resistance to change by those who are in authority positions.

The other manifestations of bureausis especially among the betrayed include withdrawal (apathy and resignation), silence, and acquiescence. Thompson suggested that the betrayed seriously suffer from bureausis when

they fail to adjust to the organizational systems, procedures and culture, and such that the inability to adjust is not so much a factor of human qualities and competencies, but more so of the rigidity of the bureaucratic organization.

Maybe because of bureausis as well, the spectators often find themselves – with or without choice – in middle positions like neutrality because of the risk of being disadvantageously identified with the betrayed. The spectators have to endure a deep predicament in being caught in middle positions. Akerström presented several dangers of middle positions: (a) wittingly or unwittingly, they reinforce bureaupathy as well as the betrayal of the betrayed; (b) they become a form of betrayal when exercised in self-preservation motives; and (c) they result in apathy, indifference and total inaction. The sum of these dangers only encourages the betrayer without mercy and restraint. Solomon and Flores (2001) also elucidated on the widespread problem of cordial hypocrisy or pretended trust which is a consequence of cynicism, resignation, distrust or loss of trust.

Bureaupathy and bureausis are effective breeding grounds of cordial hypocrisy because of the behavioral manifestations of withdrawal (apathy and resignation), silence and acquiescence of people. Neutrality and middle positions – when they reinforce betrayal – also become a cause of cordial hypocrisy.

Cordial hypocrisy is a “strong tendency of people in organizations – because of loyalty or fear – to pretend that there is trust when there is none, being polite in the name of harmony when cynicism and distrust are active poisons, eating away at the very existence of the organization.” (Solomon and Flores 2001:4). Furthermore, cordial hypocrisy comes as a “kind of poison that corrodes relationships even as it seems to hold them together; [and] much the same can be said about cordial hypocrisy in an organization, where feigned politeness and team spirit may mask resentments and inefficiencies that are destroying the organization” (Solomon and Flores 2001:19).

Trust in a cordial hypocritical pretension is a consequence of lack or loss of trust. This is the predicament of middle positions, when cordial hypocrisy becomes the pervading conduct among individuals relating in a distrustful environment. As a matter of perfunctory function, people will do their jobs, but they will not offer their ideas, or their enthusiasm, or their souls; without trust, corporations or organizations become not a community but a brutish state of nature” (Solomon and Flores 2001:5).

## Thrusting trust

The locus of betrayal of public trust is not about betrayal itself. It is all about trust. Citing a basic dictionary definition of trust, Bracy (2002) used trust as a firm reliance in the virtues of honesty, dependability, and strength of character of someone. Invoking the standard Aristotelian formula of virtue as a trait rather than a passion or faculty, Solomon and Flores (2001:79) looked at “trustworthiness as a trait of character and therefore a plausible candidate for virtue.” For Reina and Reina (1999:16), “trust is the tendency to view others as dependable and reliable in fulfilling expectations.”

Thus trust is almost always equated with virtue, and the lack of trust (or betrayal of trust) actually means lack of virtue (or betrayal of virtue). Friedrich again argued for this and cited Machiavelli's notion of a *virtu'* or the virtue of the good citizen. For Machiavelli, corruption is the process by which *virtu'* is undermined and eventually destroyed, since most men have become weak and lacking in the *virtu'* (Friedrich 1972).

But in *Building Trust*, Bracy (2002) likewise cautioned against the reductionist use of trust as mere virtue. For him, trust is not just virtue, it is also competence. Virtue alone does not earn trust. A good and trustworthy person does not automatically qualify him to be an effective governor. One needs skill and capability. On the other hand, skill and capability without virtue does not also make one trustworthy. Covey (2006) supported this view when he advanced the concept of balancing character and competence. He was more direct in his integrated definition.

Simply put, trust means confidence. The opposite of trust – distrust – is suspicion. When you trust people, you have confidence in them – in their integrity and in their abilities. When you distrust people, you are suspicious of them – of their integrity, their agenda, their capabilities, or their track record” (5).

Bracy's and Covey's views support my introductory claim about integrity (character) and intelligence (competence). Without integrity, intelligence is impunity. Without intelligence, integrity is mediocrity. Thus to be trusted – one must gain intelligence and integrity; one must cultivate character and competence. While virtue and character form the normative aspects of trust, competence is located in its context or specificity.

Trust is also dynamic, not static. Its dynamism is characterized by another principle – that it thrives in relationships. Using four components of trust (capacity trust or readiness to give trust, contractual trust, communication trust and competence trust), Reina and Reina espoused healthy relationships based on integrity and character, as well as on openness (capacity trust) which is a reciprocal process. As trust begets trust, mutually trusting relationships grow with more sharing of information (communication trust), keeping agreements (contractual trust), and respect for people's abilities (competence trust). For them, “trust is a relationship of mutual confidence in contractual performance, honest communication, expected competence, and a capacity for unguarded interaction” (Reina and Reina 1999:10).

For Csorba (2004), trust is a constant work in progress. Like Solomon and Flores, to understand trust is to build trust into everyday practices and relationships and to develop institutions in which such practices and relationships are not only possible but necessary. Trust is not just a means or medium or social glue for cohesion, it is something that we do and something that we make, build and maintain, we sustain with our promises, our commitments, our emotions, and our sense of our own integrity (Solomon and Flores 2001).

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