

Corruption *and* Individuation: How Can That Be Possible?

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Brazil

Corruption is an abuse of power that has been entrusted to individuals or organizations for their private gains. It is considered a major cause of global inequality and has been blamed for its negative impacts on the well-being of societies, and for the wasting of resources that deprives the wellbeing of a community among other troubles. Although millions of dollars have been spent worldwide to combat this evil, up to now the results have been disappointing.

Numerous books and papers have been written with foci on law, ethics, social causes, applied psychology, control, and management of corruption. Together, they form a new field of knowledge, a new academic discipline: corruptology.

Studies based on applied psychology about the personality of a corrupted person suggest that ordinary and regular people, with mainstream ideas about morality and average non-deviant personalities, can engage in corruption without experiencing psychological distress. According to some scholars, findings up to now do not reveal a consistent relationship between personality traits and corruption (Zaloznaya, 2014), but demonstrate that a corrupted person tends to have a weak moral identity (DeCelles et al., 2012), coupled with strong pursuit of personal profit and accumulation of power and also a sense of solidarity with their friends (Stove and Shaw, 2012). It is really a grey area, as Giroux (2019) pointed out: “you don’t need to be a criminal to accept bribery” which may be even culturally acceptable. Corruption corrupts, as S. Shalvi (2016) says in his paper.

Studies comparing 37 countries suggest that corruption is very much a culture bond phenomenon and institutional regulatory measures without socio-cultural

reformation may not be successful in reducing the overall level of corruption (Park, 2003).

Zaloznaya (2014), based on an extensive review, supports the idea that corruption is heavily influenced by local cultures, and by the workplace ideology. “It is not an individual pathology but rather a socially constructed condition in which the individual gets socialized by fellow members. In this manner, studies on corruption should be based on the social context and on the interactional process that surround, encourage, and constitute the deviant act itself”. (Zaloznaya, 2014, p.194)

In my clinical practice and social life in Brazil, I frequently had to deal with corrupt acts performed by "good" people. I feel that most of them are unconscious of the deleterious consequences of their acts. They just want to solve a complicate situation or have more money/power. In their minds, they did not harm anyone. The money was “public”, and they are “smart”. In their psychotherapy process, corruption was a problem only when the fear of getting caught arose. They were good fathers/mothers, good friends. Although everything would seem normal in their lives, we could observe an obvious, defined, and elaborated disengagement in the majority of them (Bandura, 2008).

How this disengagement is lived and whether corrupt behaviors can jeopardize the individuation process is a complex question.

When values associated with disengagement or lack for empathy towards the suffering of others are part of the social ethos of a society, figures of power may be accepted exactly because they incorporate these values, even so under a false persona. The followers of a corrupted leader live under the same values and will defend the leader

with their own life, because upon him/her is project their own Self. These feelings reinforce a strong alliance quite difficult to break. In a culture where bribery is a habit of life and negotiation, deviant behaviors would be a natural adaption to society. Samuels (2001, p. 81) writes about the difficulty to let go emotionally of the idea of leader-as-hero, because if we erase the heroic projection, we spoil the pleasure of identification and will feel deprived, even when the leader is destructive.

But, at the end “if individuation leads to a natural esteem for the collective norm, (and) the orientation is exclusively collective the norm becomes increasingly superfluous and morality goes to pieces. The more a man’s life is shaped by the collective norm, the greater is his individual immorality” (C. G. Jung, 1971, par 761).

The conclusion is that when corruption is systemic, administrative reforms do not suffice if there are no overall and persistent social reforms that changes the relevant aspects of national culture and the epistemology of the people in the society. The research findings suggest that fighting corruption require a tenacious, holistic, and multidimensional approach to induce an overall social reform which will gradually transform the nature of the whole society. So, we need to study the culture of a country to understand corruption.

A Case Study: Brazil as a Patient and Corruption as a symptom of its Pathology

Brazil, according Transparency International (2019) reached the rank 106 among 180 countries that has not improved over the last years. Almost every day, Brazilians

read in the newspaper scandals involving corruption and millions of dollars that have been unduly sent abroad, besides been troubled by lawbreaking or small bribes. This destructive behavior appears to be so engrained in the Brazilian culture that we have lost sight of its origin. The following old political cartoon illustrates this problem:



Image 1 Roots of corruption. Yes, I know there are other clients' shoes before mine, but if you fix mine first, I will give you a "beer" (bribe).

What are the psychological factors that could encourage this type of behavior in a culture? To answer this question, it's necessary to find a thread in Brazilian history that will help to understand why and how corruption has become so deeply rooted in the Brazilian psychological landscape: how corruption was established on Brazilian soil. The concept of the cultural complex developed by Singer and Kimbles (2004) allows us to examine a culture from the psychological point of view.

As we shall see, corruption is not only a matter of ethics or greed, but also a pathological symptom in collective identity and, in Brazil probably originates in an inferiority cultural complex.



*Image 2 Even you are laughing at my size!
But what have I done?
You put stairs for me just to reach the couch!*

Locating the cultural complex

Reviewing the most important literature concerning the Brazilian identity, a quite intriguing subject stands out and indicates an implicit feeling of inferiority in the Brazilian people, something that is often referred as the “cucaracha complex” or the “underdeveloped Latin-American stigma”.

Although this is not always explicitly stated, examples of this inferiority are more evident in daily life, literature, myths, films, political cartoons and TV shows, especially when the middle class compare themselves with foreigners.



Image 3 Meeting the “Big Ones”

(The President of Brazil asking for a seat among the “big” state leaders,1958)

Taking into consideration these various ingredients in the “Brazilian pot”, our question is whether corruption can be considered a symptom of a marked feeling of inferiority?

Is corruption - as evidenced by the compulsive and chronic behavior of breaking the law and ignoring authority – the expression of some people that unconsciously feel too infantile, weak, or impotent to openly make a claim for its rights?

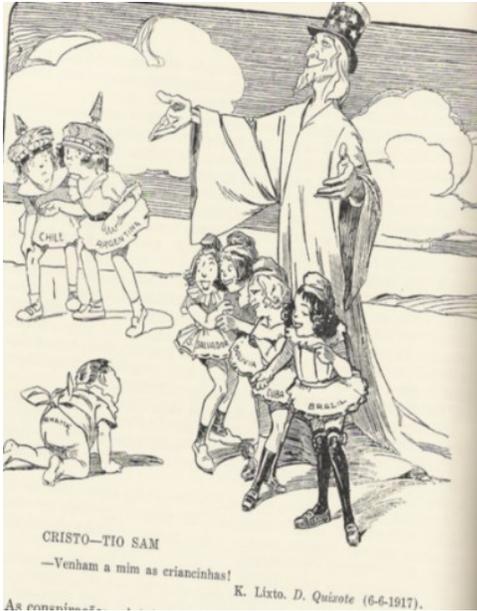
Field observation

Bearing these questions in mind and based on psychological and sociological studies and on books and articles published by the media we observed that:

Brazilian people, according to themselves, frequently use derogatory adjectives when referring to their own nationality- denigrating their own image.

Comparisons are constantly being made with people of the “first world”.

Brazilian people, according to foreigners: in North America there is the symbol of “Uncle Sam” – a white strong male fighter; representing Latin America we have images of blacks, Indians, children, women, and poor people – individuals who are incapable of dominating nature.



Uncle Sam
Came to me children (1917)



2019

Image 4

Along the same lines, during World War II, Walt Disney studios created a personality called Joe Carioca, who appeared in movies alongside Donald Duck to represent the Brazilians. Joe is a parrot who does not speak properly. He is weak, clumsy, lazy and a coward. He compensates for these failings with megalomaniac fantasies. Cartoons and movies with similar content can actually been seen on TV like *The Simpsons* and *Fantasia* by Disney, among others. There was no complaint from the Brazilian government (Ramos, 2004).

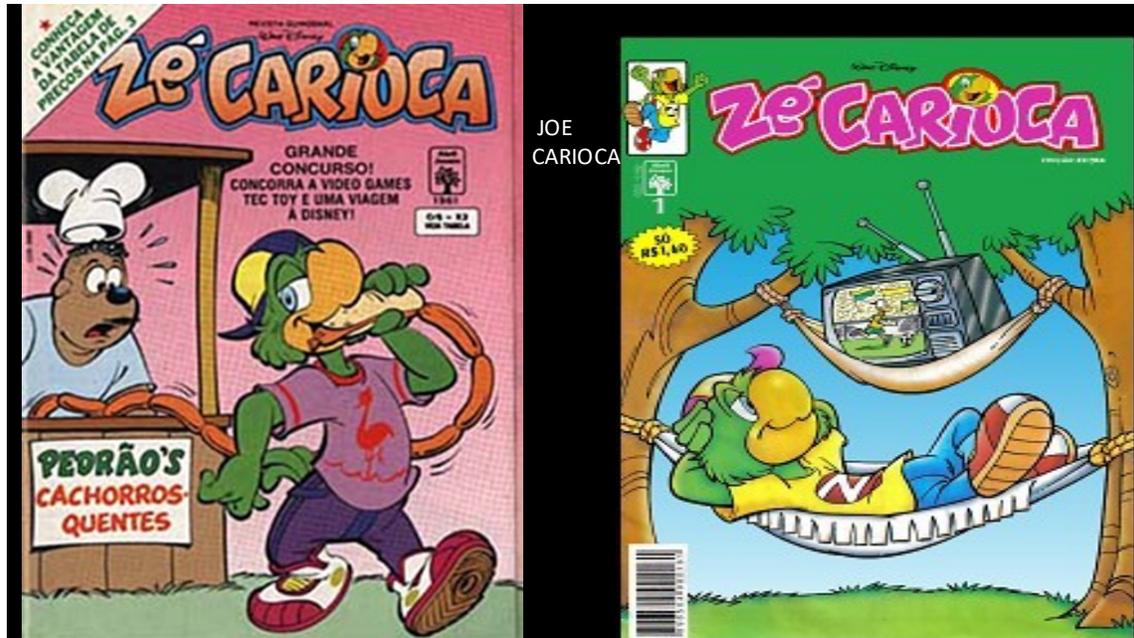


Image 5

This national inferiority feeling results from the comparison with developed nations, highlighting the continuous economic failures, the economic instability, and social inequalities. However, the real roots of the collective self-abjection, and this general embarrassment of being Brazilian, can be found in its historic origins.

Possible causes of the inferiority complex

In the search for the basic conflict that may give rise to this complex, the history of the creation of the Brazilian nation is extremely revealing. Brazil was born out of trauma with two dominant threads: colonization and slavery.

Myth of origin: Brazil as a tropical paradise in medieval imagination

A significant projection onto Brazil as a paradise existed before its founding in 1500, thus affecting the basis upon which the collective identity was structured. Even the name has this meaning: *O`Brasile* meaning the land of the fortunate or happiness.



Image 6

Colonization

Portugal never intended to establish a new nation; during centuries there was a predatory exploration. The sole intention was of taking the riches back to the king of Portugal. They never intend to engage in "nation building". The Portuguese arrived alone, leaving their families behind to exploit the new land and return to Europe. They raped and killed the natives; their children were rejected by the father and by the mother's tribe. There was no economic plan, no schools; rich children were sent to Paris to study.

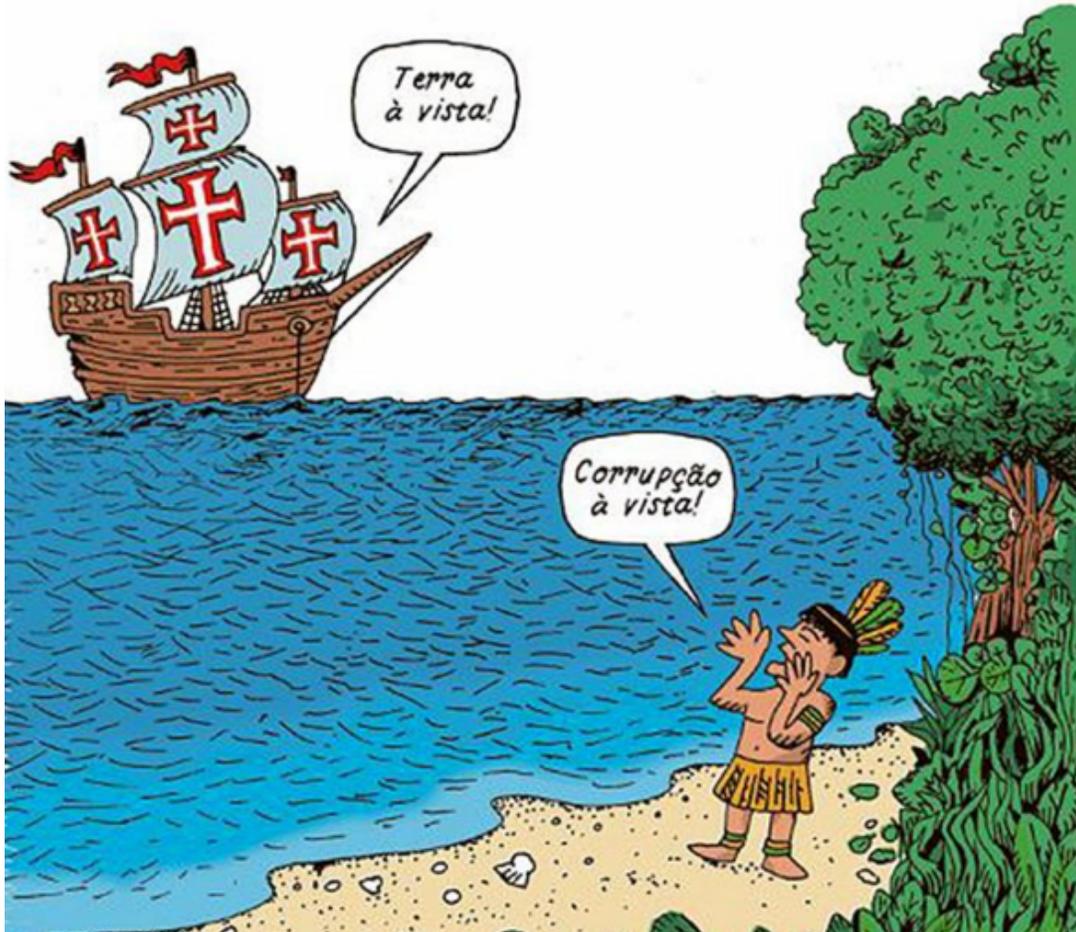


Image 7 I see land! I see corruption!

African slavery

The other major thread of the trauma in forming Brazilian identity is slavery, which together with colonization resulted in almost complete domination. About 3 million African slaves were brought to Brazil to do the exhausting manual labor required on sugar plantations. Their descendants up to now represent the poorest and less educated part of the population.

Cultural Complex of Inferiority.

In search of the original conflict (which would be at the heart of this inferiority complex), we have some main factors present in the formation of the country's identity: myth of origin; foreign projections; slavery and colonization (see Ramos, 2004 for the complete presentation of this research).

These traumatic factors plus the consequent lack of a national hero myth, form a cultural complex and its defensive symptom is corruption:

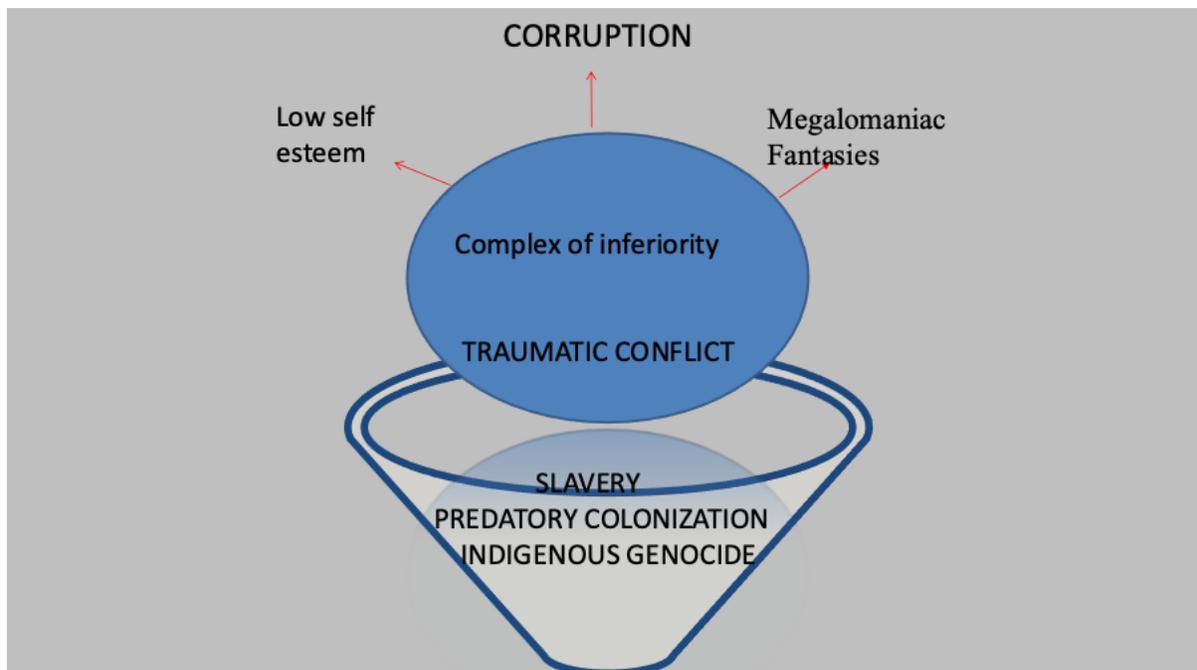


Image 8 Trauma and the cultural inferiority complex

Conclusion

The myth of Brazil as a Paradise is continually reenacted in an attitude of permissiveness that is reproduced by the behavior and psychological processes of corrupt individuals, who have disdain for the law and feel a delight in civil disobedience.

The image of a European father whose only objective was to exploit the country and to become as rich as possible, is present today as some figures of authority seem to escape the shame by incorporating and reproducing the father-bandit roles: “nobody messes with me” - not even the law- unconsciously reproducing the exploitative behavior of the colonial father: nothing is to be established, built, or produced. The goal is “to take advantage”, to create a false superiority. Discourses of morality are swallowed up by the negative paternal complex.

The lack of a loving bond between father and son may partially explain recidivism in delinquency as well as corruption in leaders. They cynically use “affectionate protectionism” to impede complaints and uncovering of their corruption. How is it possible to complain about someone who abuses power while at the same time extends his/her hand to offer protection?

History is full of examples of how dictatorial regimes have filled the gap of the absent father. Political power imposed by force, by the firm and repressive hand can be more “affectionate” than certain democratic regimes, where affection has been displaced from parental complexes to an attitude of alterity.

The belief of the impossibility of overcoming the destructive father and the lack of knowledge about what constitutes the real strength of Brazilians are evident

consequences of the national inferiority complex, which, in turn, are compensated by fantasies of grandeur like ostentatious government projects and giant carnival parties.



Image 9

But technical skills and good taste in the elaboration of fantastic cars and costumes are not used in daily life. After Carnival, “kings and queens” return to their poor homes in the slums. There is no integration of these skills into personal development.

Many groups from large educational institutions (governmental and non - governmental organizations) have discussed this problem in search for educational and remedial measures. But, as long as there is no real awareness of the unconscious factors that contribute to the pathology of this cultural complex, public or private efforts will

have only a short-term and repressive effect. In this case, a puritan persona would be established whereas the neurotic core would remain untouched.

“Only a change in the attitude of the individual can initiate change in the psychology of the nation. The great problems of humanity were never yet solved by general laws, but only through regeneration of the attitudes of individuals” (Jung, C.G. ,1953, par. 4).

In the process of individuation, a real change will occur when the underlying conflicts are painfully faced, including the emotional acceptance of the tension between inferiority-superiority polarities. With conscious assimilation of the original conflicts around abandonment and rejection, new archetypal energies may be freed up to land their potential for creative renewal to shape a new collective self-image in the process of individuation. With self-esteem rescued, there will be no place for corruption as a pathological symptom of a cultural complex.

Perhaps then, corruption in Brazil might be once again restored to its natural role in the age-old drama between good and evil.

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