CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER VIII

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In the present research, an endeavor has been made to work out a sociological interpretative study on corruption at the macro level with special reference to selected Southeast Asian cases. In accordance with the theme of the current study, the researcher has adopted a two-dimensional analysis in his approach to the issue. First, the theoretical analysis, that has been centered around the theoretical issues which include the question of the definitions, the sociological perspectives to the study of corruption, forms, types, causes, consequences, and checking of corruption. Second, the applied dimension, which has been devoted to the investigation and analysis of the phenomenon of high level corruption in the Southeast Asian Countries generally and in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, The Philippines, and Indonesia specifically. The limited nature and scope of the study together with the literature review and the research methodology applied have led to various conclusions and findings, and allowed for some recommendations to be offered.

8.1 THE FINDINGS OF THE THEORETICAL PART

At the theoretical level the study highlighted the urgent need for an all-inclusive sociological interpretation of corruption. Such a need for a multidimensional approach to corruption emanates from the conviction that no single approach can cover the issue comprehensively. Research on corruption has often been faithful to the researchers' area of specialization, which may have restricted the vantage point(s) from which the phenomenon has been approached. It is worth noting that in recent years, the issue of corruption has drawn the attention of more and more

scholars in political and economic sciences. Academic forums and newspapers devoted more space to it. However, such interest tends generally to be descriptive rather than analytic, and selective rather than comprehensive.

An inevitable outcome of the fragmented approach to corruption is the conceptual ambiguity that continues to surround the phenomenon. Acknowledging the great variety of meanings of corruption and the ongoing debate over the concept, the study has compiled as many definitions as possible, analyzed them critically, and classified them into five categories; literal, legalistic and bureaucratic, economic, and socio-political. Although the answer to the question "what is corruption?" varies principally according to the definer's background and the scope of the research, it is agreed that corruption involves the violation of socio-cultural and political standards set by a given society and prescribed to preserve public interest, public opinion, folk and legal norms.

The sociological perspectives; Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic-Interactionism, provide us with rich and important concepts and tools to understand corruption. The fact that corruption does not lend itself to any single perspective supports the need for the multi-dimensional approach adopted through the present study. Corruption is best understood by examining it from more than one perspective. It is from this platform that an Islamic approach imposes itself as a viable alternative. The Islamic perspective, though it is based only on the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, provides a platform for a comprehensive approach to corruption applicable beyond Muslim societies. The Islamic enjoinments to lead a corruption-free life echoes similar calls by other major creeds in the Region, namely Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity.

The examination of the particular manner in which corruption exists, or is carried out in the society has identified three major forms of corruption, that include, (a) bribery and extortion, (b) nepotism and (c) cronyism, and graft. Bribery stands out as such a notorious phenomenon that some people perceive it as synonymous with the word corruption. Nepotism in turn, has proven to be a complex form of corruption for it is a social-psychological phenomenon that involves the emotional feelings of a person and his loyalty to family and friendship ties that influence his official behavior towards law and regulations particularly in granting services, privileges, and positions on grounds other than merit and qualifications. The various forms of graft notably fraud, blackmail, and all sorts of economic plunder toxically affect the government budget and cripple any efforts for development. The notorious grafters are usually those people who hold sensitive positions and have vast powers.

The aforementioned classification is by no means exclusive. Social scientists diverge greatly on the typology of corruption. In fact, it can be admitted that the distinction between forms and types is not a straightforward task. The researcher has reviewed the typologies of Alatas, Heidenheimer, Onoge, Lowi, and Transparency International and found that the types of corruption include, extortive, manipulative, nepotistic, petty, routine, aggravated, black, gray, white, primary, secondary, big, and little. This list could be extended to include other types such as intentional, spontaneous, political, and bureaucratic corruption. This typology is most often useful in conceptual clarifications, for, in reality corruption is usually practiced secretly and could not be classified in colors (white or black or gray). Furthermore, the measurement of its frequency of occurrence, degree of seriousness and size may create irreconcilable different views.

The conceptual ambiguity resulting from the different approaches appears to have generated a further undue confusion between the forms and types of corruption. A closer look suggests that these concepts should not be treated as alternatives. They are two distinct components that need to be studied rather separately. Forms are more reliable as grounds to address the issue of corruption in this study.

Social scientists have proposed inconsistent interpretations of the causes of corruption. Furthermore, the socio-cultural and political roots of corruption have fairly been given due consideration. It is concluded that corruption spreads and develops not only because of a single factor but also due to the interaction of a multiplicity of causes. It is the outcome of the interaction between the socio-cultural, political, economic, legalistic and bureaucratic factors. These causes may vary from one society to another. They may equally vary in the same society from one case to another. For instance, one of the main causes of corruption is the absence of morality in the acquisition of wealth, power and prestige.

Nevertheless, while social scientists variety of approaches to corruption is perfectly understandable, their disagreement over its effects may be undue. The issue of the consequences of corruption appears to have led social scientists to an impasse. Few students of corruption claimed positive impacts of corruption particularly on development, social instability and bureaucratic rigidities. A review of the theoretical as well as empirical studies on the subject has led to the conclusion that studying the impacts of corruption on the economic and bureaucratic spheres has been the apparent major focus of the majority of researchers. The socio-political effects of corruption have not been fairly and thoroughly addressed. The researcher fully supports the view that corruption has crippling effects, as it makes the socio-economic and political spheres of society totally dysfunctional. It plays no role in

social stability or economic efficiency. Corruption cannot be beneficial to society. It makes society disintegrated, politics chaotic, the economy sluggish and non-productive and the bureaucracy inefficient.

It goes without saying that the conflicting views of corruption and its effects have a clear bearing on the strategies to put this phenomenon under control. With regard to the checking of corruption, there is a pressing need for more efficient collaborative measures to face the sophisticated practices of corruption.

In order to strengthen the anti-corruption drives and make them up to the task, the researcher suggested some guidelines for a sound and comprehensive checking of corruption. Among these guidelines:

i) Corruption should be systematically studied from all academic angles and its negative and destructive nature should be admitted by all anti-corruption powers.

ii) The anti corruption strategies and measures have to spring from within the social context in focus and should operate on all fronts.

iii) All anti-corruption powers should concur in the formulation, implementation and enforcement of these measures and strategies.

8.2 THE FINDINGS OF THE APPLIED PART

Corruption is a common problem to Southeast Asian countries in general, and the five countries under study in particular. The plague proportions it reached in the post-colonial era has drawn the attention of the public and NGOs. As a result of the rising impatience with corruption, pressure on rulers and governments to check corruption is gaining momentum and getting more systematic and obvious. The response from the governments is praiseworthy. It, unfortunately, lacks genuine

determination. This lack of resolve allowed corruption to spread through all the socio-economic strata in the Region. It has become a plague that strikes Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian countries alike. The people belonging to the three dominant religions in the Region; Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, have failed in their role and their religions. Their involvement in corruption constitutes a deliberate violation of their religious and moral teachings. The involvement of people from different socio-cultural backgrounds in corruption belies any attempt to link a special group or community with a specific type of corrupt practice. There is no clear association between a specific type of regime or colonialism and corruption. Political changes in Southeast Asian countries have often been justified by fighting corruption. The case of Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia are good examples not only of the military's failure to honor its declared intention to fight corruption, but also of the generals' deliberate involvement in the corrupt handling of public affairs.

The widespread of corruption in Southeast Asia begs for a careful and comprehensive examination that takes into account all the socio-cultural factors. It is very hard to discuss and understand the issue of corruption in the Region unless due consideration is given to, at least, the historical, socio-cultural, and political developments and circumstances. A brief look at the Region's past readily points the finger at the foreign elements, be they the colonialists or the alien communities they implanted in those countries within the divide-and-rule strategy, and foreign companies boosted the existing corruption and imported new aspects. Corruption stands out as one of the outsiders' undesirable notorious legacies in the Region. It is from this perspective that colonialism is often held responsible for the socio-political instability that continues to thwart the Region's efforts towards development. Corruption has had a direct bearing on the social and political stability of the

different Southeast Asian countries particularly Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. What appears to aggravate the situation and deprive the Region of a real chance to improve is the absence of efficient reliable social and civil institutions. Southeast Asian countries share weak civil social institutions and generally suffer from the lack of or inefficient running of independent anti-corruption bodies. The weak civil infrastructure provided the rulers with a breathing space. It is generally observed that the political leadership and the governments in Southeast Asian countries are not serious about eradicating corruption. Their moves against corruption are symbolic and make more sense as political propaganda rather than as a sincere desire for checking corruption. The cases of Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines support this claim. Nevertheless, while the local front against corruption seems to be weak and inefficient, the International and the regional organizations working or interested in the region of Southeast Asia have geared enormous efforts towards the reformation and checking of corruption by providing both technical and financial assistance. To the misfortune of the region, the success of these organizations was limited partly because they failed to take into account all historical, cultural, political, societal, and economic specificities of the Region. Their dependence on the respective governments has been another obstacle. The case studies have shown that the problem with rulers and monarchs is that they are not accountable to anybody and they think very much of their own enrichment and luxury rather than the interest of their subjects who have given them their trust and brought them to power for some of them came through military coups and do not have any allegiance to the people. Marcos and Estrada may stand out as the best examples. The unaccountability of rulers places political corruption at the top of the list. It has the most far-reaching effects on all aspects of social life. The most

dangerous point of political corruption is when thieves from either civil or military backgrounds rule the political system, obstruct good governance, and hijack people's rights to lead a happy and honest life.

The presentation of the study's findings in two separate parts should not, however, cloak the close relationship between them. It is, indeed, only when theory and practice are woven together that the picture of corruption in the Region got clear. The two aspects are so complimentary that neither can make sense without the other. On the one hand, a patent understanding of the phenomenon of corruption in Southeast Asia would not have been possible without the theoretical platform provided in the first part of the study. The different theories of corruption not only elucidated how sociologists from different schools would approach the issue, but most importantly enlightened an obscure side of historical, cultural, societal and political lives in the Region. On the other hand, the concrete coverage of the Southeast Asian experience represented the apparatus against which the validity of the theoretical assumptions was tested. The examination of corruption in the Region lent substantial support to the theoretical classification of corruption advanced in the previous section. It also proved the multiplicity of its roots as well as its multidimensional nature. Moreover, the deterioration of political life in the Region stood as a concrete witness to the assumption that corruption was the foe of social and political stability.

Out of the approaches reviewed in this study, the Islamic perception stands out as a viable solution to eradicate corruption. The Islamic perspective insists that goodness is the initial status of creation and corruption is a human invention. Corruption from an Islamic perspective is not an "Original Sin", it can be eradicated if humans have the genuine will to fight it. The fight against corruption is

compulsory for every human being. Its checking should be peaceful, and the religious institutions as well as scholars play a leading role in this endeavor. Islam rejects corruption at the principal level. Islam does not tolerate it no matter how small or insignificant it may be. The Qur'anic concept of *Suht* encompasses all forms of corruption.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance future studies on corruption the researcher would like to draw the students' of corruption attention to new areas of concentration and recommend the following research be carried out:

(a) Social scientists and academic institutions have to play a vital role in the anti-corruption campaign. They should make concerted efforts to unveil tacit aspects of corruption and bring them to public attention.

(b) More attention should be paid to corruption in the different countries of Southeast Asia with special focus on how present corrupt behavior is a residue from pre-colonial as well as colonial attitudes. Due regard should also be paid to the various historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic structures, which existed in these societies.

(c) Sociologists and reformers have to intensify their efforts to change the old customs that constitute obstacles before transparency and honesty.

(d) Corruption should be treated as a global issue and a multidisciplinary subject now more than ever before. However, the socio-economic characteristics of each country or region need to be taken into account.

(e) Social scientists and reformers specialized in Southeast Asia should acquire a moral perspective into checking corruption to cater for the future generations.

(f) Civil society' institutions in Southeast Asia should be strengthened.

(g) New anti-corruption laws and administrative regulations should be carefully studied before passing through parliaments and also before implementation and enforcement.

(h) Social scientists should direct adequate effort to critically and bravely analyze political corruption particularly the abuse of political power, illegal financing of electoral campaigns, and vote buying.

(i) The international and regional organizations namely the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Transparency International (TI) need to adopt sharper methods and work collaboratively. They should also find out the best ways and means to help eradicate political corruption. More funds should be allocated to political reforms, and continuous efforts should be made to follow up the implementation of the recommended strategies and measures in each country or region. This recommendation, however, should in no way be taken as a green light for such institutions to interfere with the internal affairs of the sovereign countries.

(j) The public awareness of corruption should be raised using all possible genuine means other than political propaganda.

(k) Anti-corruption bodies need to be aloof from any political influence that may affect their work. Governments should refrain from exercising any pressure that may hinder these agencies' plans of action.