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### Interrogating the Phenomenon of Corruption as a Form of Violence Against National ‘Common Good’.

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Corruption is a monster that defies any attempt to slaying it in many respects. Further, corruption is hard to define and isolate because it mutates into many forms in very short times. Many societies have suffered because corruption becomes rampant and almost into an everyday phenomenon. Where that is the case, corruption morphs into a type of violence which robs society of its access to what is commonly known as ‘Common Good’. Common Good is the ideal which every member of a society looks forward to enjoying without undue restriction, it is the un-inalienable right that every member of society expects by virtue of being human. In parts of the African Continent, corruption prevails as though the abnormal is literary normalized. In this article, I make an assertion that corruption is a form of violence which compromises access to human dignity and modest self-esteem. In itself, violence is bad enough as it makes life and enjoyment of life impossible. The conceptualization that is presented herein including the attempt that is made to prove the observations using various evidence weaves the statements into a legitimate concept that cannot be overstated nor gainsaid. The article perceives the denial of the common good at two levels, namely at the individual and at the national levels. Taking the evidence provided and discussed in the article leaves no room for doubt in respect to the assertion that corruption is indeed a brutal form of ‘violence against the common good’.

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## INTRODUCTION

Violence is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which manifests in various forms. Throughout the centuries humanity has suffered violent experiences such as oppression, conflict, injustice, slavery, etc. Isaiah the biblical prophet writing around 650-550 BC applauds a person who does not engage in activities which lead to the suffering of others. The prophet commends one who lives an upright life, namely one who does not tell lies, enjoy oppressive gain, take bribes, encourage shedding of blood nor participate in evil practices.<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary Kenyan society, there is widespread corruption. There is both small-scale and large-scale corruption. Where corruption takes place in a large scale, the result is suffering such as what happens in a violent scenario. Further, the rate of occurrence of incidents of corruption and its magnitude is so high that social commentators are wondering what has gone terribly wrong.

I do not undertake to provide an exhaustive assessment of the complex phenomenon of corruption. My focus is to attempt to show how corruption may be regarded as a form of violence. I shall confine myself to considering how corruption is a form of violence which injures the national common good in a country. In this article I assert that corruption is in fact a very cruel form of violence. Below is an attempt to show how corruption may be regarded as violence.

## THE NATIONAL 'COMMON GOOD'

'Common good' comprises the extent of interconnectedness to each other and to the commonly agreed social ideals that are to be found in a well-meaning society; becoming that which defines a society or a nation. 'Common good' in a nation is found in that which connects the citizens together because it is the mutual bond among all citizens.<sup>2</sup> The opposite of common good is pursuit towards self-aggrandizement through acts of selfishness which undermines that mutuality. This is found among some citizens who think that the norms other people live by do not apply to them.

The philosophy of 'common good' is commonly used to contrast individualism against collectivism; where the latter is preferred to the former in the sense that whereas individualism promotes self-interest, collectivism promotes shared interest. In a nation all citizens are expected to benefit from the national 'common good'. Common good is the expectation that social, economic, political, among other systems work for the benefit of all.

'Common good' refers to what is expected to be at the disposal of all in a society, so that it is ordinarily considered to be that which is for the benefit of the many in contrast to the 'good' of an individual or the few. Throughout history, the idea of 'common good' has been widely held. It is generally assumed that national common good is that which is in the interest of all citizens in a nation. National common good is meant to promote the general good feeling of all citizens wherein every citizen thrives.

<sup>1</sup> The message of Isaiah 33:15 was written at a time when Judea was undergoing trying political moments. The exile experience which ensued was presumably a result of the lack of civility in the national life.

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Reich, *The Common Good*. Published by Alfred A. Knoff, 2018. Accessible online at <https://www.amazon.com/common-good-Robert> 2018.

'Common good' is expected to be accessible to all citizens. Whoever hinders this accessibility whether individual, institution, or government is guilty of misconduct. Examples of the 'common good' include freedom of association, affordable health care, public safety, just legal systems, equitable economic structure, sustainable environmental awareness, among others. The common good also includes; food, shelter, fairness, justice, personal security, and access to essential services. For society to effectively harness the common good, social systems must be functional. It is the responsibility of both institutions and individuals to ensure this functionality. The thinking about 'common good' strengthens the argument that society is meant to be a single unit, not of independent individuals living in isolation.

### **Violence in Relation to National 'Common Good'**

Violence is a common phenomenon found at individual, societal, national, and international levels. There are many forms of violence; including mental, physical, as well as psychological. Violence is manifested differently. It may be verbal, spiritual, gender-based, domestic, political, physical, sexual, and emotional among other forms. During the last decade new forms of violence have emerged in relation to technology. These include cyber violence and online bullying through social media, otherwise referred to as digital harassment. The violence comes in form of hacking, online threats, and attacks.<sup>3</sup>

At the present time, the mass media is awash with coverage of macabre forms of violence that are committed at levels unimaginable before. The violence has morphed into a magnitude not experienced earlier. Husbands are becoming

extremely violent to their wives, fathers to their children and children to their parents. An example of such extremes is given of a husband who subjected his estranged wife to gang rape and acid attack leading to her death.<sup>4</sup> Cases like these are becoming more and more common.

Violence has greatly blurred the virtue of kinship to the extent the celebrated African virtue of the extended family structure is seriously under threat. Youngsters who traditionally are socialized to respect the elderly are today the opposite of the glorious past. Violence in its various manifestations threatens the very future of African society. Violence disrupts the peaceful and tranquil coexistence that is expected to be the ideal in a nation. Yet this is not the case. In Kenya and indeed in many nations in Africa, violence has become the norm rather than the exception.<sup>5</sup>

In 1999 the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern Africa Theologians (ESEAT) discussed various dimensions of violence as was evident at that time. The Symposium published a book, *From Violence to Peace* drawn from the discussions of the theme.<sup>6</sup> Nearly two decades later the manifestations of violence have not decreased, if anything they have mutated and significantly increased making violence a galvanizing concern of our time. In the volume, Peter Kanyandago explains that violence may be perceived as 'that which harms physically or morally, abuses, or injures'.<sup>7</sup> To consider violence as being physical and moral widens the scope of what disrupts the common good.

Violence is evil by nature.<sup>8</sup> Evil is a negation of all that is good and noble. It mutilates the fundamental tenets inherent in the dignity and integrity of humanity, thus fighting against individual and communal well-being. The virtues of dignity and

<sup>3</sup> On Tuesday March 13, 2018 NTV 9.00 PM News televised the National Assembly showing enraged members of Parliament who complained to the Speaker about being harassed through the social media. Parliamentarians indicated that many of them were receiving obscene and pornographic messages in their cellphones. One woman member lamented that women Parliamentarians risked divorce from husbands who may misinterpret the messages.

<sup>4</sup> The Standards Newspaper, 'Tears as woman in acid attack, rape is laid to rest.', February 3, 2018, p.25.

<sup>5</sup> Consider the popular fencing styles you often see around rich people's homes comprising a stone wall with an electric wire to

booth. As if that is not enough, the gate bears the warning; 'this facility is protected by' indicating the name of a security company.

<sup>6</sup> Mary N. Getui and Peter, Kanyandago, *From Violence to Peace: A Challenge for African Christianity*, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Peter, Kanyandago, 'Violence in Africa: A Search for Causes and Remedies' in Mary N. Getui and Peter Kanyandago eds., *From Violence to Peace, A Challenge for African Christianity*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999, p. 7

<sup>8</sup> Peter N. Anasi, *And Deliver Us from Evil*. Trafford Publishing, 2004, p.97.

integrity are integral to enjoyment of the common good. In this chapter, I examine corruption as a form of violence which threatens national common good.

### Corruption as a Form of Violence

Violence does not always mean full-blown conflict or war. It is the presence of circumstances which hinder enjoyment of common good. Because corruption disrupts enjoyment of common good to a large extent, this discussion classifies corruption in all its forms as a form of violence.

According to Transparency International, a working definition of corruption is ‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gain’.<sup>9</sup> Transparency International is a facility which deals with issues of governance especially about financial management in the public sector. The World Bank uses Corruption Perception Index as an indicator to gauge the level of corruption in a country.<sup>10</sup>

Corruption is a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon. In a report written by the Commonwealth Secretariat, corruption is viewed as a serious obstacle to development.<sup>11</sup> Further in a study conducted by the Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION) corruption is defined broadly; ‘the definition of corruption is broad and capable of incorporating a wide range of malpractices, both subtle and overt.’<sup>12</sup> Some of the malpractices contemplated in the definition include bribery, fraud, embezzlement, abuse of office, and irregular election to public office among others.<sup>13</sup>

Corruption is violence because it denies justice to the most deserving, opting instead to benefit the one who is more endowed in terms of financial, political influence, material wealth, and so forth. Corruption is a monster that defies delineation. In Kenya for instance, manifestations of corruption mutating and change constantly such that the phenomenon keeps

being subtle and elusive at every turn. To look at it from a broad perspective, corruption is viewed as a precarious moral and ethical issue. In an article discussing morality in public life Zablun Nthamburi describes corruption as a condition which leads to injustice because it impedes the cause of justice. According to Nthamburi ‘there can be no fair play where there is corruption’.<sup>14</sup> In other words, in a corrupt environment there is no level-playing ground. Where corruption is involved, the competing edge is obliterated because corruption keeps switching the goal-posts so that it is impossible for the disadvantaged to score.

### Corruption as Disruption of National ‘Common Good’

Corruption disrupts the national common good in many ways. Take for instance matters to do with general elections. In a corrupt system, the candidate who is declared winner may not be the actual winner because money and partisan interests play a decisive role in for example parliamentary contests. Corruption denies the rightful winner the victory giving it to the one who has corrupted the system. In this case corruption blatantly disfranchises both the voter and the democratic process.<sup>15</sup>

Where a corrupt deal is cut in order to benefit the undeserving person the result is oppression of the rightful beneficiary who probably belongs among the weak and the voiceless. Take for example a case where a rightful winner of a scholarship is short-changed so that through a corrupt deal the financial support is given to someone who does not merit it. Where this happens, it can be said clearly that the national common good is infringed upon.

The reason why the World Bank fights corruption is because the institution sees corruption as a hindrance to national welfare. In 1996 the World Bank president James D. Wolfensohn likened

<sup>9</sup> Transparency International, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2011/in-detail#my>

<sup>10</sup> Anwar Shah ed., *Performance Accountability and Combating Corruption*. Washington D.C. The World Bank., 2007, p.308.

<sup>11</sup> Commonwealth Expert Group, *Fighting Corruption: Promoting Good Governance*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Ludeki Chweya, et al., *Control of Corruption in Kenya: Legal-Political Dimensions 2001-2004*. Nairobi: Claripress, 2005, p.23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>14</sup> Zablun Nthamburi, ‘Morality in Public Life’ in J.N.K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike eds. *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity. Exploratory Essays in Moral Theology*. Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1992, p.116.

<sup>15</sup> Where this happens, it resonates with what Russian ruler Joseph Stalin (1878-1953) is believed to have stated; ‘it’s not the people who vote that count, it’s the people who count the votes.’

corruption to a type of cancer. Here is how the Bank conceives corruption; ‘corruption hurts the poor most severely: it diverts public services from those who need them most and strangles private sector growth’.<sup>16</sup>

A classic example of corruption infringing on the national common good is where funds allocated to a public project are misappropriated or swindled so that they end up in individual pockets instead of the project which was slated to benefit the society.<sup>17</sup> There are cases where money budgeted for road construction ends up in a public officer’s bank account while the region which ought to have benefited from the road project continues to suffer.

During late 2015 and early 2016 the mass media reported high level corruption in the Ministry of Devolution and Planning where it was alleged more than 790 million Kenya Shillings belonging to the National Youth Service had been stolen. The money was meant to mitigate youth unemployment through funding of youth entrepreneurship including disbursement of funds to small and medium business enterprises. The money was not channelled to its original purpose; instead, it was fraudulently siphoned to business firms which did not deserve to be paid. Here is a benchmark case of corruption coming out as violence to the common good in a nation. If the misappropriated funds had been put to their original purpose, the national common good would have been realized and gainfully advanced.

Corruption is not only evil; it is also exceedingly corrosive. Corruption corrodes the common good in a country thus compromising national harmony. Because of corruption what is right may be made to appear wrong and wrong to appear right. In the report by the Commonwealth Secretariat, it is underscored that corruption hurts the common good because it undermines well-directed development.<sup>18</sup>

### Endemic and Systemic Corruption in Kenya

Unfortunately, because of desperation the youth are willing and ready to give or take a bribe and to

engage in a corrupt practice. Like many other countries with young populations, in Kenya where unemployment is high, young people aged between 18-33 years are ready to do anything to get money including through unlawful means.

Many Kenyans do not think that there is any moral value compromised when caught up in a situation of corruption.<sup>19</sup> This is due to the fact that in most cases, whenever a case of financial impropriety is reported, life seems to continue as usual. Many times, nothing changes, not even reshuffling of the officers involved.

In Kenya there is a tendency that seems to convey the impression that corrupt deals pay. There are cases where people who are known to cut corrupt deals appear to live well out of the deals. There are cases where shortly after someone has gone into public office that the individual suddenly starts to dangle money and property which definitely is ill-gotten. Where that is the case, it soon starts to appear as if it is profitable to engage in corruption; as if to say that Kenyan society glorifies corrupt deals and impunity. Further, it appears like those who live out of the proceeds of corruption are not apprehended or incarcerated according to the law. Such ones dangle their ill-gotten wealth as if to taunt those who insist on honest means of earning a living.

In January 2016, the then Attorney General (AG) of the Republic of Kenya expressed himself in reference to a damning report that had just come out of Transparency International ranking Kenya as among the habitually corrupt countries of the world. The AG had a grim view of the condition in the country. According to him Kenyans seem to normalize the abnormal. When a Kenyan is employed in a public office the expectation is that he or she is expected to enrich oneself from the public kitty through what the attorney general referred to as the *sungura mjanja*<sup>20</sup> (crafty rabbit) tactics. Kenyans have gone into idolizing those who defeat legal systems, circumvent lawful processes

<sup>16</sup> The World Bank, *Helping Countries Combat Corruption. Progress at the World Bank 1997*. Washington D.C. 2001, p.1

<sup>17</sup> Chweya et al., *Control of Corruption in Kenya* p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat report, *Fighting Corruption* p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Nehemiah M. Nyaundi. ‘Revisiting the Ethical Quandary of the *Kitu Kidogo* Culture’ in Shawna Vyhmeister ed. *The Global*

*Ethics Crisis. An Adventist Response*. Nairobi: Adventist University of Africa Press, 2015:191-200.

<sup>20</sup> *Sungura Mjanja* is a proverbial expression which takes from the cunning nature of a rabbit in traditional folk tales.

including adoring those who are perceived as living off the proceeds of dishonesty.

Many argue that churches are blameworthy in promoting a culture of corruption among public personalities especially politicians. Churches are viewed as culpable because they accept donations from politicians as if implying that any money is good money; when in fact that money is ill-gotten. Similarly, it is popularly held that some of the generous donations that politicians donate to churches is actually a form of money-laundering. That is to say that church organizations may find themselves consuming money obtained from corrupt deals.

Early in the month of September 2017 a prominent Kenyan politician made a donation to the Pentecostal Assemblies of God during a national Pastors Convention at the organization's headquarters. The donation which was a tidy sum of money caused a stir among the leadership of the church because some of the leaders questioned the motive of the donation at a time when political electioneering was going on.<sup>21</sup>

The sad part of it is that church leaders accept the big donations from politicians even when they can suspect that the donations have strings attached. Politicians do not necessarily make big donations for free. They do so with their eyes strongly trained on the 'big picture' which is political allegiance mostly in terms of block voting which churches are known for. Clergymen who do not worry about big donations irrespective of the motive attached may be said to have made the proverbial resolution 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil'.<sup>22</sup>

Is it possible that the church as an institution plays a role in promoting the vice of corruption? Can the church be part of the mechanism to fight corruption? Can the church mitigate the process of fighting corruption? Is it possible to imagine a situation where the church is entangled to the extent that it is part of the wheels of corruption? Answers to these

critical questions are not necessarily obvious. The Kenyan government has tried to fight corruption. Take for instance that on November 23, 2015 the president declared corruption a national security threat. Responding to a proposed 'Anti-Bribery Bill' prepared by Kenya Private Sector Alliance, the president called corruption a sin against God.<sup>23</sup> The impact of that ambitious declaration is yet to be seen. The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission is a constitutional instrument tasked to tackle the vice.

Just as the case is with other communities, it is perhaps right to argue that Kenyan Christians are pious on Saturday and Sunday but come Monday to Friday they are busy negotiating fraudulent and underhand deals. This is in tandem with Boloji Idowu's proposition that African Christianity is a one day of the week type of vocation<sup>24</sup>. How does one explain the fact that approximately 80% of Kenyans are Christians and yet the country is rated as part of the habitually corrupt societies? According to the Corruption Perception Index of the Transparency International which was published on January 27, 2016, Kenya is position 139 of 168 countries surveyed.

When taken to task about the prevalence of corruption, government authorities hit back alleging that corruption is found permeated throughout the Kenyan society because those who work in government offices where corruption is found are Kenyans. The contention is that public officers are corrupt because the vice is ingrained in the civil society including among Non-Governmental Organizations who shout loudest about corruption in the public sector.

It is often the case that prominent Kenyans carry themselves around while dangling their wealth in the form of flashy motor-vehicles, residency in posh-estates, sharp dressing in designer and trendy clothing, engage in high street life-style, etc. Kenyans who are suspected of living off ill-gotten wealth without the law catching on them, the

<sup>21</sup> Daily Nation Newspaper, 'Ruto's Sh10m 'donation' splits church.' Monday September 25, 2017 p.10.

<sup>22</sup> The origin of the proverb is not certain. But it is commonly used to portray a person who does not want to be involved. The proverb is expressed by three monkeys who are pictured covering their ears, eyes and mouth.

<sup>23</sup> The Star Newspaper, 'Uhuru declares corruption a national security threat, calls it a sin against God.' Monday November 23, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> C.G. Baeta, ed. Christianity in Tropical Africa. Studies Presented and Discussed at the Seventh International African Seminar. University of Ghana April, 1965. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, p.433.

message that goes out is that it is profitable to use corrupt means to rise to the top of the social ladder; namely you can be corrupt and still live scot free. Such is the raw material that the marvel of impunity is made of.

### What is the Way Forward?

It is evident that corruption has deep roots in Kenyan society. In fact, it has been said that corruption is deeply-ingrained in Kenyans' DNA.<sup>25</sup> The possible way forward is to take Kenyans through a concerted paradigm shift so that a new crop of citizens which is not inclined to corruption can emerge. The question is how to go about that paradigm shift.

Marie-Anne Razafiarivony<sup>26</sup> has some suggestions as to how to grow a new calibre of people in society. According to Razafiarivony the way to do it is by deliberate instruction in what she calls ethics education.<sup>27</sup> That is to say that Kenyan society needs to consider exposing all citizens to ethical values including socializing the citizenry in matters of openness and transparency. It goes without saying that this would be effective and meaningful if done at an early age in the lives of Kenyans so that they grow up with the values inculcated into the national psyche.

It is reasonable to say that non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, the civil society, and the mass media have made and continue to make impact in sensitizing the citizenry about the pitfalls found in a corrupt society. Their weaknesses notwithstanding, the National Council of Churches of Kenya is known for its constant statements against wrong-doing among public officials. The media is always at the front-line reporting and condemning corrupt practices in the country. Indeed, there are visible efforts to combat corruption, but what may not be as visible is evidence to indicate a changed mentality in the society.

<sup>25</sup>Nehemiah M. Nyaundi, *Rethinking God: Exploring the Interface between Religion and Social Reality*. Zapf Chancery: 2015, p.146. According to the imagery, many Kenyan public figures dabble in fraudulent deals to the extent they cannot qualify to be 'Caesar's wife.'

The strategy of executing that exposure and socialization is to incorporate values of justice and fairness in the school curriculum beginning from primary, secondary right through to university level. The present scenario appears to suggest that those who have obtained riches and wealth seem to dangle their exploits even if it is known the means used to amass the wealth are questionable.

### CONCLUSION

Is there something that citizens of a country owe one another? I think it is clear that there is; honesty, trust, openness, fairness, and regard to one another. The national common good comprises habits, thinking pattern, beliefs and practices policies, structures, legal frameworks, institutions, social socialization, which benefit the society as a whole in contrast to private or individual interests. Concern about 'common good' is critical among human societies because of what it achieves when present and what lacks when it is compromised.

The more desirable option is for any nation to work together for the common good of all. That being the case, then it becomes apparent that all citizens be asked to contribute to the maintenance of that ideal. Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) one time president of the United States once observed, 'There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed'. Finally, it is appropriate to state that where a nation does not aspire to reach the threshold of the common good of all, only failure can be the result.

In reference to the evidence covered herein it is not far-fetched to say that corruption is a spectacle with characteristics similar to that of a virus which constantly mutates itself. Consider for instance that corruption is capable of entrapping even the saintliest of people; how it is skilful to the extent that it entangles even the public officer who is employed to combat it. Being aware of this complexity makes it imperative to know that any attempt to combat corruption must be multi-pronged and multi-sectoral. Further, let it be said that to

<sup>26</sup> Marie-Anne Razafiarivony, Teaching Marketing Ethics in Faith-bases Institutions in Shawna Vyhmeister ed. *The Global Ethics Crisis: An Adventist Response*. Nairobi: Adventist University of Africa, 2015, p. 231.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.233.

combat corruption a country needs to resolve to operate aggressively towards 'zero-tolerance' by way of stringent enforcement of the law against the vice.

A country which would hope to eradicate corruption could start by emulating 'best practices' from countries which have low incidents of corruption. Such countries are known for their adherence to transparency, accountability, insistence on the rule of law and related best practices. Furthermore, among countries with less occurrence of corruption the role of civil society in governance is generally evident. Sociologists see the civil society as institutions which are outside the state machinery but which claim a stake in governance in a state.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Peter L. Berger. 'Religion and Global Civil Society' in Mark Juergensmeyer ed. *Religion in Global Civil Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.12.