Call for Papers

International Workshop

CORRUPTION AND THE MODERNISATION OF THE STATE: IDEAS, DISCOURSES AND

PRACTICES IN THE PRE-MODERN ERA AND BEYOND (1600-1930)

Historisches Seminar der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München,

Munich, 7th-8th April 2022.

Keywords: Corruption, Modernity, State Building, Longue Durée, Conceptual History.

Since the "coronation of the citizen" (Rosanvallon 1992) via suffrage, the conquest of individual rights, and social autonomy, corrupted practices have been regarded as a remnant of a period of feudal privilege and arbitrary social relationships. Nevertheless, despite the official proclamations and the optimistic belief in the principle of the separation of powers, the advent of the parliamentarian institutions not only did not put an end to deceits, abuses, or misconduct, but entailed and encouraged new forms of clientelism and bribery (Engels 2010). Far from wanting to fall into a pessimistic, anthropological view of human nature, challenging the theory of modernization allows us to reflect on political modernity from a broader - and somehow less simplistic - historical perspective.

As the notion of corruption can be traced to the late-medieval period (Buchan and Hill 2014; Torra-Prat 2021), posing questions about how we should frame corruption within the processes of modernization allows social scientists to revisit chronology, reconsider interpretations, and seek new definitions. In this sense, this workshop considers corruption to be a long-term object rather than a moral category that arose in 1789 to legitimise or castigate previous, foreign, or current societies. One can find in the past models of both prevarication, nepotism, or concussion and efforts to curb corruption and control abuses of power (together with an awareness of the common good) in colonial communities and societies outside the liberal-capitalist framework. In order to stress the continuities, ruptures, and turns regarding political corruption during the premodern era and beyond, this workshop intends to reflect on the articulation between State-building process and the discourses and practices of both corruption and anticorruption by taking into account how political, economic, and social agents dealt with the following three axes:

Money talks. Corrupted souls and corrupting forces

The existence of "corridors" (Monier, Dard, Engels 2014) that connect the public sphere with private interest has been a constant feature of the performance of power since the consolidation of parliamentary regimes. The power-holder may abuse his position, favouring friends or companies, selling positions, or diverting funds. In turn, public representatives can be victims of blackmail, find themselves in the delicate position of

supporting obscure and partisan interests to the detriment of the national or common good, as the enrichment of the so-called war profiteers show (Dard, Engels, Monier 2020). Caciques, pressure groups or lobbyists, and political factions become privileged actors for studying the porousness between the two spheres Benjamin Constant so proudly represented as the cornerstone of modern society. Thus, this panel encourages contributions that dig into the relationships between the corrupters and the corrupted in a larger sense, considering colonial experiences and divergent regimes.

Vigilance over Power. Denunciations of fraud and channelling irregularities

Despite its inherent variety of meanings, corruption (and the vast vocabulary related to it) has been usually presented as a negative trait, an aberration that undermines the rules or ethics of a given political system. Corruption not only defines negligence, political wrongdoings, or malpractices but is also a mirror in which tolerance limits are confronted (de Blic, Lemieux 2005). Demands for transparency or accountability are at the heart of modern societies, while these claims make the awareness of public opinion towards politics evident. In consequence, this panel expects case studies that consider Juvenal's quote *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* [Who watches the watchers?] in a broad sense. Here the existence of several Cultures of Vigilance [*Vigilanzkulturen*], which link individual attention and supra-individually set tasks to allow actions such as whistleblowing, are crucial (Brendecke 2018). The denunciation of malpractice by the opposition, the use of accountability procedures by subjects to *control* the public administration or the creation of scandals in the press can be thought of as external mechanisms for both regulating power and for preserving the public good. Conversely, they can also be used as a strategy to erode authority or institutions, because the discourse around and practices for anti-corruption (Kroeze, Geltner, Vitoria 2017) have also been employed as political weapons, both in the Early Modern and Modern times (Pubill Brugués 2019; Knights 2021a).

Blurred lines? Conceptualising corruption in premodern and modern times

Corruption is neither an ahistorical nor universal concept. Its meaning cannot be encapsulated in a Weberian, ideal definition because its sense depends on the immediate political, social and legal context. Moreover, as Knights (2021b) has put it recently, it is a concept constantly under dispute. Conceptual historians have tended to give little attention to the issue surrounding corruption and its vast vocabulary, especially during the premodern period. The very assumption of the existence of a unique *Sattelzeit* (1750-1850) in Western societies (Koselleck 2011[1979]) that led to the unfolding of new political values, cultures, and procedures linked to the idea of the bureaucratisation and modernisation of the State left limited room to explore the concept of corruption in premodern societies and its ties to state-building. In contrast to this viewpoint, this panel wants to explore the existence –or the lack of– more *Sattelzeiten* throughout time and

among different territories, societies, and regimes with the aim of confronting their differences, (if any) in the construction of the notion of corruption.

We welcome proposals of ca. 500 hundred words concerning the above-mentioned topics until the 15th of January 2022, along with a short CV. The proposals must be sent to corruptionmodernity2022@lrz.uni-muenchen.de The final decision on the received proposals will be announced on the 31st of January 2022. The contributions presented during the workshop will be collected for publication by a leading publisher.

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