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Cognition, Cultural Practices, and the Working of Political Institutions: An Adult Developmental Perspective on Corruption in Russian History

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Corruption is one of the typical problems facing societies that aim at making transitions toward modern, Western-type democracies. Even though corruption also exists inside most developed democracies, the scope and quality of corrupt practices, as well as the way they are evaluated and dealt with by politics, justice, and public discourse, differs substantially, depending on the degree of complexity of the dominant political, legal, and economic cultures in the respective country. This article looks at how a developmental perspective can provide deeper insights into the role of patronage, clientelism, and corruption in Russian society. It is based on an earlier in-depth discussion on the relation between adult development and phenomena of corruption (Fein & Weibler, 2014), and draws on the metatheoretical framework for analyzing corruption, discourses on corruption (and anticorruption), and action taken against corruption developed there. By looking at how these phenomena have changed in Russia over the past 150 years, it shows that developmental perspectives provide a considerable surplus value for analyzing and understanding culture and society, as well as the functioning of political institutions. Both can be interpreted in relation to the dominant level of complexity of Russia's political culture as it has changed over time.

Keywords: corruption, Russia, development, culture, structures of reasoning

> We don't take bribes, but we accept tokens of gratitude.
> —Russian saying, quoted in Kelly (2000, p. 65)

Although phenomena such as gift giving or using one's office for private gain are considered corrupt in many contemporary societies, among them in most Western ones, similar practices are perfectly common and legitimate in many others. Therefore, the question arises to what extent and why the same phenomena are both evaluated and dealt with differently in different contexts. As for Russia, despite several important regime changes over the past 100 years, it has been, and still is, known for relatively high rates of corruption. Actually, since Vladimir Putin has taken office as Russian president, Russia's rating on Transparency International's Corruption Scale has dropped back from Rank 82 in 2000 to Rank 136 in 2014 (www.transparency.org). Therefore, studying corruption in Russia in a longitudinal perspective appears as an interesting showcase for analyzing the development of culture and cognition as proposed here.

The degree of corruption of a given country cannot be regarded independently of its overall social and political system, and, in particular, of the culturally rooted, often implicit values and practices that shape the actual functioning of social and political institutions. This is where adult development theory has to offer interesting insights. The complexity of human reasoning and meaning making to a considerable extent determines the kind and complexity of social practices by which existing cultures are operating. Moreover, it is often precisely discrepancies between individual reasoning and organizational or institutional demands that are at the basis of problems of corruption (in public and private organizations, institutions, and other entities alike). Based on a closer look at selec-

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tive aspects of the dominant political culture, this article aims at demonstrating, in more detail, how developmentally informed perspectives can help to understand, and even deal with, both historical and current phenomena of patronage, clientelism, and corruption in a more differentiated and more effective way.

In a nutshell, it shows that the dominant modes of cognition, meaning making, and culture (as far as they become visible in empirical historical sources) have developed from mainly concrete, interpersonal logics to more abstract and, ultimately, formal logics from the late 19th to the 20th centuries. At the same time, modes and norms of interaction have changed, and "corruption" has started to become an issue of public debate and concern. However, with culturally and politically dominant logics of meaning making not yet having achieved the systematic level, corruption remains a problem and is not yet being successfully tackled by government and social institutions.

Focusing on Russia has several advantages in this regard. First, looking at a society that underwent two major systemic transformations in less than 100 years allows for comparisons between three (ideal typical) phases of history. Even though prerevolutionary tsarist Russia, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia had radically different political institutions and values, all of these periods were, to varying degrees and in different ways, struggling with phenomena of corruption. Second, this longitudinal perspective allows for an analysis of the special features of each period and the transitions between them. It thus allows for investigating which factors might have been important in determining their respective character and fate. Third, a broad empirical basis allows for a more thorough weighing up of cultural versus structural arguments and, thus, for more theoretical rigor and differentiation.

Based on a developmentally informed metaframework largely inspired by the model of hierarchical complexity (MHC) published earlier in this journal (Fein & Weibler, 2014), this article holds that corruption (as a problem of perception) is grounded in specific logics of reasoning and behavior (for Russia, see also Gabowitsch, 2013, p. 63). A culture dominated by more complex habits of reasoning and interrelating is likely to produce more complex institutions. It will develop more clearly defined roles, as well as more differentiated rules and mechanisms with regard to how those roles are expected to be filled in social life. In turn, both depend on concise contextual factors, in particular, interrelated structural developments of cognition and culture shaping a society's dominant values, forms of interaction, and institutions.

Outline and Structure of the Present Research

The article first offers a general discussion of the relation between cognition and (political) culture. In other words, how do adult developmental measurables, such as the structural complexity of cognition, reasoning, and meaning making in a society, on the one hand, influence widespread cultural practices, including the functioning of political and economic institutions informed by those practices, on the other hand? The article then gives a brief summary of the mentioned theoretical metaframework for interpreting corruption in view of the question of how phenomena like patronage, clientelism, and corruption, as well as their perception (i.e., its social, political, and scientific evaluations), change as culture and cognition increase in complexity. It claims that these changes can, to a considerable extent, be explained on the basis of relevant theories and models of structural adult development. The article then provides evidence from three different periods of Russian history in order to illustrate the relation between cognition and culture in more detail. Article sections 2–4 look at corrupt phenomena, attitudes evaluating them, and actions fighting them in one specific period of Russian history each: prerevolutionary tsarist Russia, Soviet Russia, and post-Soviet Russia. The concluding paragraph discusses some of the implications that a developmentally informed perspective on corruption yields for our understanding of the phenomenon, and thereby for "unmasking corruption."

Theory, Epistemology, and Methodology: Integrating Culture and Cognition

> The attempt to integrate sociology and psychology remains a topic of recurring interest, but efforts of this kind have been largely marginalized. . . .In order to move beyond the limits of contemporary social and political psychological approaches, a fundamentally new theoretical orientation is required. (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 430–446)

Epistemological Basis

So how can the relation between *culture* and *cognition*, or between *mind* and *society*, be conceived of in a developmentally informed and theoretically sufficient way? As a matter of fact, the discussion on mind and society, on individual thinking and behavior and its social environments, is as old as sociology itself. Although most sociologists, among them discourse theorists, tend to adopt the perspective that "the quality of an individual's thinking is significantly determined by the quality of the discursive exchanges in which she participates" (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 439), psychological perspectives tend to focus more on a complex view of the individual subject as a source of structuration. Quite obviously, both perspectives describe important aspects of the same overall phenomenon. However, because sociological discourse has neglected or even ignored psychological dimensions for a long time, this article proposes to integrate them into the analysis of culture and society in a more systematic way. This is not to claim a unidirectional causal relationship in the sense of a psychological determination of social structures, but only to illustrate the relevance of cognitive structures in the context of multiple and complex interrelations with social structures, for "substantive realities are not simply a manifestation of a structure, but are operated on by it" (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 445).

The theoretical outlook on the social phenomenon of corruption presented here proposes an integrative approach, based on Rosenberg's (2003) recognition that "social life is *dually structured*, by both thinking, feeling individuals and by socially organized, discursively constituted groups" (pp. 431–446). It thus urges to integrate sociological and psychological perspectives through a structuralist and context-sensitive view of both *mind* and *society.* It integrates not only individual and collective actors' perspectives, each being "subject to the constraining and potentially transforming influence of the other" (p. 447). It also integrates internal and external perspectives, that is, subjective and objective (social and institutional) factors, as well as the relations between them. Systemic transitions such as those in Russia and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, and more recently in Northern Africa, each resulting from multiple (political, cultural, economic, institutional) structural crises, have shown that most conventional social science perspectives alone are not sufficiently complex to understand them. Analytical frameworks focusing, for example, on institutions only are unable to grasp the deeper cultural and cognitive legacies (such as values, world views, identities, motivations, etc.), which, often enough, are at the heart of both successful and unsuccessful transitions. In case of the latter, it has been found that one of the reasons why transitions fail is that deeply rooted cultural practices counteract the functioning of newly introduced institutions, or, as Rosenberg has put it, that many individuals subjected to societal transitions "seem to lack the cognitive and emotional resources to respond in the way required" (p. 432) by the respective new institutions or organizational rules.

At this point, it is argued that adult development theory is a means to get hold of both the structural logics of individual thinking and acting often neglected in social and political analysis, and their social implications in a more systematic way. As a rule, organizations, just like societies in general, "are comprised of individuals operating at multiple stages of development in various domains" (Ross & Commons, 2008, p. 484). Therefore, "there are many overlapping systems and relationships among different people and entities" (Ross & Commons, 2008, p. 484). At the same time, there are always modal stages at which most individuals operate within organizations, societies, and governments, and that thereby characterize the way in which those entities are likely to operate as a whole (Commons & Goodheart, 2007). So even though "these two structuring forces [mind and society] are attempting to regulate the same concrete ground, that is the specific ways in which people act on one another," and even though they are pragmatically intertwined and open to each other's influence . . . they may operate in significantly different ways (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 432).[1] Therefore, they

[1] Rosenberg's quote continues as follows: On the one hand, a social interaction is structured by the understandings and purposes of the individuals involved, each . . . determined by her characteristic mode of coordinating her own actions. . . . As a result a particular interaction between individuals is subjectively structured. On the other hand this interaction occurs in a larger social context and is regulated accordingly. A social group or society has a characteristic way of coordinating the various social exchanges that occur among the members of the collectivity. (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 431–446)

> cannot be collapsed onto those of the other . . . (but) must each be analyzed in their own distinctive terms. . . . As individuals are deconstructing and reconstructing social exchange in their own terms, the collectivity is deconstructing and reconstructing these individuals' initiatives and responses in its cultural and social structural terms. (Rosenberg, 2003, pp. 431–446)

Developmental Theories and Models Used

Besides Rosenberg's general epistemological considerations, the theoretical perspective proposed in this article draws on a number of major developmental models. However, given its empirical, rather than theoretical, focus, it can only provide a brief introduction to the two most important models here, namely, that of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981) and the MHC (Commons, 2008), whereas a more differentiated account of the different dimensions of culture and cognition relevant for analyzing corruption (in particular, cognition, social cognition, moral reasoning, and moral action, as well as their interrelations) has been spelled out in more detail elsewhere (Fein, 2012). This article limits itself, first, on some remarks on moral development, because, according to Chilton (1988), "any way people relate to each other"—including "all publicly common ways of relating" and organizing social interactions, including social institutions—are moral projects. Second, it uses the MHC as an overall structural stage model, which eliminates dependence on mentalistic, cultural, or other contextual explanations, and helps to clarify the important transition between Kohlberg's "interpersonal" stage (Stage 3) and "authority and social order" stage (Stage 4).[2] Fein and Weibler (2014, Table 2) provide an overview of the relations between Kohlberg's model and the MHC's stage definitions.

Kohlberg's model[3] helps to identify typical dilemmas of corrupt behavior. In his neo-Piagetian theory of political development, Chilton (1988) has illustrated this by the example of a bureaucrat. His professional ethics (loyalty to the rule of law, Kohlberg's Stage 4 morality) is challenged by various arguments, each of them coming from a different complexity level of morality: Stage 1, threats; Stage 2, bribes; or, most common in transitional contexts, Stage 3, appeals to friendship. An effective bureaucracy as an abstract system of rules needs moral justification, that is, bureaucrats functioning at Stage 4, typically arguing that observing rules and laws is an aim in itself, because, otherwise, social order and/or the respective organization would break down. What happens when the professional ethics of a bureaucrat functioning according to a Stage 3 (interpersonal) morality is challenged on that same level is illustrated by Chilton's following example:

> Client: Why don't you just set aside those requirements? After all, I am a friend and neighbor of yours!
>
> Bureaucrat: If I did that I would disappoint my boss, who is counting on me to follow the rules.
>
> Client: How can you put your boss ahead of me, your old friend and neighbor?
>
> Bureaucrat: (no answer).

A bureaucrat making moral judgments on Kohlberg's Stage 4 would immediately recognize the inadequacy of this demand. Our Stage 3 bureaucrat, however, "might dimly feel that the client's appeals in terms of friendship or personal ties are wrong, but stage 3 counter arguments give no clear support" (Chilton, 1988), because his personal ethics of service are equally stemming from a Stage 3 personal loyalty, instead of from the rules or laws themselves. Chilton's example not only illustrates a typical discrepancy between the institutional logic of a bureaucracy and the action logic of empirical actors, showing that "unless the institution's structure is preserved by people at the appropriate stage, the institution will regress to less developed forms" (Chilton, 1988, p. 88), but also makes clear that the transition from Kohlberg's Stage 3 to Stage 4 action logics is crucial for overcoming and preventing corrupt behavior in organizations.

For analyzing the transition between these stages, the MHC can make valuable contributions through its more differentiated stage definitions. Moreover, it shows that what we call

[2] Validation studies have shown a very strong relation between traditional scoring according to Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview (MJI) and the MHC's Hierarchical Complexity Scoring System (HCSS), the latter even being more exact than the MJI due to content-independent absolute scaling (Commons, Galaz-Fontes, & Morse, 2006). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Model_of_hierarchical_complexity.

[3] For a brief summary, see http://faculty.plts.edu/gpence/html/kohlberg.htm.

"corruption," that is, the misuse of public office for private gain

- only comes into being as a social phenomenon after the abstract concepts of "public" and "private" have been formed (MHC Abstract Stage 10), whereas the respective behaviors constitute the normal way of acting on MHC Stages 9 (concrete) and below;
- is only considered problematic and socially harmful after contradictions between social norms and individual behavior, as well as between different social roles (i.e., public/private), can be coordinated in a nonarbitrary way (MHC Stage 11).
- corruption can only be prevented or at least effectively reduced once efficient social systems (legal, financial, market systems, etc.) are functioning as the dominant social, political, and economic structures, and are supported by a sufficiently large number of people (MHC Systematic Stage 12). This is also where most discourse about corruption takes place;
- adequate and sustainable solutions of the problem of corruption are likely to be achieved only on the basis of at least metasystematic structures of reasoning (MHC Stages 13 and higher), which are able to understand the inherent logics of corrupt behaviors and to design stage-sensitive solutions beyond "one size fits all."

More detail about how behavior changes as action logics increase in complexity, and how understandings, perceptions, and evaluations of corruption change as reasoning becomes more complex, is provided in Fein and Weibler (2014; see especially Table 3). So how does this apply to prerevolutionary, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia?

A Note on Methodology

The empirical part of this article offers a developmentally informed reading and interpretation of previous social science descriptions of patronage, clientelism, and corruption in Russian history. The following three sections mainly draw on various existing studies on these phenomena covering the period from the great reforms in the 1860s until the present time. My focus is on qualitative studies offering contemporary first-person accounts of individuals who found themselves either in "patron" or "client" roles. This is because first-person accounts allow for insights into typical social actors' thinking, reasoning, and meaning making. Note that this article can only provide selective insights into the dominant patterns of meaning making in each historical period and is not based on extensive study of primary sources of my own. Systematic reference to both Russian social history and to social science discussion on corruption is not possible here either due to space limitations. Rather, this article proposes an alternative reading of how we can better understand contemporary logics of reasoning based on a developmental lens. This also refers to how structures of meaning making influence both the emergence of specific social and institutional environments as well as social actors' behavior in them.

Tsarist Russia: Early Abstract Concepts and Interpersonal Culture

> Institutions have no meaning. Everything depends on persons.
>
> —Konstantin Pobedonoscev, advisor of Russian Tsar Alexander III (Baberowski, 2008, p. 19)

Historians have described society in late tsarist Russia as a "society of physical presence" (Baberowski, 2008, p. 19) or as a "gift giving society" (Schattenberg, 2008, p. 33), in which the efficiency of power depended on the quality and stability of personal networks. The latter, in turn, were built and stabilized through practices of exchanging material and immaterial goods against loyalty, personal service, or obedience. Patron–client relationships were universal, unquestioned phenomena structuring the whole society, including its social, economic, and political institutions. At the same time, typical elements of modern statehood, such as impersonal institutions, the rule of law, and professional work ethics based on personal skills, formal qualifications, and specialized knowledge were nonexistent. This is also true for the idea of a responsible, self-authoring citizen, as well as for a Weberian-type bureaucracy based on abstract, rational forms of thinking and organization. As more complex structures, the latter remained foreign to the concrete habits of contemporary reasoning and interaction (Baberowski, 2008, p. 19). This observation is supported by historical accounts of both

administrative practices and of the professional identities of Russian officers in late 19th century.

In her in-depth analysis of political and administrative cultures in tsarist Russia, Susanne Schattenberg has described the contemporary regime according to Weber's ideal type of the patrimonial state. Its clerks practiced an almost symbiotic relationship of reciprocal dependence with their masters. At the same time, their relation toward abstract legal ideas or objective official duties was rather undeveloped. Therefore, for the typical clerk, his sponsor was the basis of his career, comparable with a "second father" as the following recommendation to a younger colleague indicates:

> Don't rely on your capabilities, but on protection. You are a genius, you can achieve anything. . . . But if you don't have protection, you are a complete idiot, you are worth nothing, and you will not earn anything in office. (Schattenberg, 2008, p. 92; my translation)

The same was reciprocally true for the patrons whose power also depended not exclusively on their objective position or know-how, but on the quality and stability of their clientelistic networks. Moreover, both sides had a strong and ongoing interest in declarations and demonstrations of mutual loyalty and support. These were, in fact, a currency of much higher value than any modern, monetary currency, that is, receiving a rise in pay and/or more challenging work responsibilities, could have been (Baberowski, 2008, p. 23). For the average officer, the most important element of this premodern payment currency was receiving signs of the patron's grace, such as titles, increases in rank, and medals of honor. As in most premodern societies, honor played a crucial role in social life. So did, consequently, expressions of emotions connected to received or denied honor, for example, emotions of pride and gratitude or of anger, offense, and revenge. This can be illustrated by statements from 19th-century Russian clerks, such as "The praise of my patron fulfilled me with the greatest delight I have ever experienced" or "He was pleased like a little child about being awarded the Alexander order on tape. He went to church where it was cold, but still took off his coat, so that everyone could see his order" (Schattenberg, 2008, pp. 113–115).

Obviously, these clerks' professional ethics were not based on their competences, on their professional achievements, and on doing qualitatively good work, but rather on having and cultivating good relations with their patrons, the latter functioning as both idols and paternal protectors throughout the ups and downs of life. The fact that patrons literally nourished their clients, and vice versa, is expressed by the Russian term *kormlenie* [feeding], originally describing the medieval Russian system of supporting officials at the expense of the local population. Inversely, patrons all the way up to the tsar distributed offices as a reward for loyal behavior. Consequently, they could hardly expect those offices to be run differently than according to personal interest, gut instinct, or the so-called *sluzhebny takt* [tactfulness], which simply meant trying to get along sufficiently well with all important local stakeholders in order to avoid trouble.

This state of affairs and social relations, it is argued, largely corresponds to Kohlberg's interpersonal reasoning structure (Stages 3 and lower), combined with action logics of MHC Stages 9 to 10, while the spirit of lawfulness and strict obedience to rules described by Weber as prerequisites of modern bureaucracy is clearly missing here. The main reason for this is that local clerks had relatively low general, and almost no special, education. Officers' memoirs frankly admit that most of them had no clue concerning the laws and procedures of the state they were serving:

> Most officers served exclusively because of the honor or for earning a certain rang or medal, without really taking an interest in the files or in the essence of the matter. They signed anything that came to them by the chambers. (Schattenberg, 2008, pp. 113–115)

In fact, professional, as well as higher general, education were systematically missing in late-19th-century Russia. Although early-19th-century Germany already had a three-stage school system and demanded A-levels, studies of law, legal clerkship, and two state examinations in order to enter state service, Russia only introduced compulsory education in 1917 and did not demand specific knowledge from its clerks, except for reading and writing skills. At the same time, prejudices such as "it is unworthy for grown-ups to learn something new" or "he who knows a lot,

grows old faster" (Schattenberg, 2008, p. 77) were widespread. It can thus be assumed that formal operations (MHC Stage 11) were, by far, not a common, but rather a fairly rare, quality among Russian officers. Moreover, certificates and credentials could easily be bought on the market, if needed.

Similar practices, as well as phenomena of patronage and clientelism in general are only regarded as "corrupt" by MHC Formal Stage 11 and higher structures, whereas they are the normal way of "getting things done" in MHC abstract or lower stages. It is therefore not surprising that many contemporary officers perceived attempts to modernize local administration after the great reforms in 1864 (which also introduced modern judiciary and impersonal principles of administration) as personal attacks on their values and way of life. Hence, many of them strictly opposed and refused to obey them. This considerably hampered modernization and polarized society in late tsarist Russia.

In fact, the developmentally based metaframework referred to here holds that corrupt phenomena can only be efficiently fought by Action Logics 12 to 13 (Kohlberg's 4 to 5, late conventional and postconventional). Parts of the Russian political and judicial elite had in fact developed these stages of complexity, often in the context of extended legal studies in countries like England, France, and Germany. They were thus eager to overcome what they perceived as the backwardness of their home country by implementing legal reforms. However, the average level of the dominant culture in tsarist Russia (as represented by the cognition of the clerks quoted here) most probably did not reach similarly complex stages. This does not imply blaming any of them for their culture. On the contrary, recognizing that corruption can only be meaningfully criminalized, let alone overcome, in contexts in which the dominant standards of moral reasoning have reached at least a formal or systematic level, respectively, in other words, if social actors are simultaneously provided with the opportunity to develop their structural cognitive capacities.

The following paragraphs will look at the question of to what extent and how such growth and development of cognition and culture actually took place on a broader societal level in more recent phases of Russian history, and what consequences this entailed.

Soviet Russia: From Abstract to Formal Operations, With an Interpersonal Morality Still Dominating Over Systemic Thought

> The rules are equal for everyone, only the exceptions are different.
>
> —*Literaturnaya gazeta* (December 28, 1977)

> Soviet generations have a much better sense of rules even if they violate them.
>
> —Ledeneva (2006, p. 2)

So how have practices of social interaction changed in the Soviet Union? And what role did "corruption" play during Bolshevik rule? As has been shown with regard to tsarist Russia, the notion of corruption is not an issue and actually makes "little sense in patrimonial systems were jobs were given away in order to 'feed' their holders" (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 257). Russian sociologist Alena Ledeneva therefore correctly argues that

> corruption is a modern concept, associated with the transformation of what Weber described as patrimonial power structures, where decisions are taken not on the basis of institutionalized rules but on the basis of personal relationships and traditional forms of authority. (Ledeneva, 2009, pp. 258–259)

Consequently, understanding the nature of social relations in the Soviet system and society is closely linked to the question of to what extent it actually achieved its own pretense to be(come) a modern state.

At the outset, it has to be recalled that phenomena such as informal practices are generally difficult to document, even more so when talking about a closed society such as the Soviet one. Also, a systematic ethnography of public administration practice (Ledeneva, 2009) comparable with the one on tsarist Russia cited earlier is still missing for Soviet Russia. However, there is a broad consensus regarding the overall nature of the regime. Scientific observers widely agree that Soviet society was not only ideology driven, but that concrete person-to-person relations continued to shape political and economic relations. Its existing formal institutions only hid the actual clan structure of Soviet society. In this sense, continuities seem to dominate the picture at first sight. In fact, "political clientelism not only proved to be a

quintessential characteristic of the Stalin era and one of (its) most durable political legac(ies)," but that "patron-client relations have played an important role in the recruitment, mobility, and behavior of politicians throughout the over seven decades of Soviet power" (Willerton, 1992, p. 32). The enormous privileges of the nomenklatura in all areas of everyday life as described by Soviet émigré Michael Voslensky (1984) are another telling illustration of a transformation of content (Bolsheviks replacing tsarist officials) but not of structure (Clark, 1993). Susanne Schattenberg compares Soviet nomenklatura and the privileges connected to it with the Petrine table of ranks (Schattenberg, 2008, p. 249). And Jörg Baberowski (2003) recognizes elements of the code of honor as it was common in male conspirations in Stalin's native Georgia when looking at the General Secretary's governing practice from the 1930s on. Breaking the code of mutual loyalty meant being excluded from the community and sometimes even being physically "liquidated." In her study of the more recent period of Soviet history, Alena Ledeneva similarly cites a former member of the nomenklatura from Novosibirsk, saying, "Every enterprise or organization is first of all a person and his contacts" (Ledeneva, 1998, p. 172). To explain these observations, Willerton argues that "the Soviet political system's lack of any formal means for a new leader to form a new administrative team encouraged clientelistic networks" (Willerton, 1992, pp. 1, 11). So what has actually changed in the Soviet period, and to what degree can we observe development toward greater complexity in the dominant culture of reasoning and meaning making, of organizing social relations and the ways of getting things done? How did the role of law change and to what extent did observing rules turn into a socially accepted value?

An important feature of Soviet everyday life can be summarized by the popular saying "*Nel'zja no možno*," which freely translates as "it's forbidden but possible." Corruption was regarded by Lenin as one of the major legacies of the old regime. Thus, the Soviet regime officially condemned it as a step toward modernizing the country—and a way of distancing itself from the previous regime. However, it did not sanction corrupt practices systematically. Instead, criminal prosecution of corruption, if it did happen, was often perceived a sign of lost intrigues. Also, it was sometimes even those who were uncovering intrigues that were prosecuted, as suffering criminal prosecution was regarded as a symptom of a lack of good relations, and thus of protection in the upper echelons of power. In other words, although laws against corruption existed, respecting the law was (still) not regarded as a binding civic and professional duty by most people and holders of public offices alike. Indeed, another popular saying went, "For friends we have everything, for enemies we have the law" (quoted in Ledeneva, 2009, p. 271).

Common and frequently cited phenomena in this regard were the so-called *blat* relations, defined by Alena Ledeneva as the "use of personal networks for obtaining goods and services in short supply and for circumventing formal procedures" (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 257). Without blat, life in the Soviet Union would indeed have been very difficult due to permanent shortages and malfunctioning systems of production and distribution. Ledeneva has conducted an extensive oral history interview project with former Soviet citizens in order to study the phenomenon. Her findings account for both the persistence of strong relational orientations (Kohlberg Stage 3) in Soviet culture *and* a certain increase in reflexivity, that is, a change in how ordinary citizens perceived their own role in that social system. As to the first aspect, the following quotes (all from Ledeneva, 1998) show the importance of exchanging gifts and favors in service of cultivating good social relationships:

> Relationships were more important than immediate repayment. . . . It is not the present but the sentiment that counts. (p. 55)

> Between friends the requests can be unlimited. . . . It is mutual trust in each other. The relationship is based on the belief that we are friends and will do everything to maintain it. (p. 146f.)

> It was a form of socializing. Like at an oriental bazaar, where they do not put price labels because they do not want to be treated instrumentally. They want to be asked, to talk, to bargain. Not for the sake of price . . . they want to be treated socially. (p. 140)

> Exchange rates are (therefore) subordinated to the social relations between actors. (p. 142)

This mode of taking and giving can be seen as an expression of Kohlberg's interpersonal logic of reciprocity (Stage 3), especially because other duties—among them, legal ones—were sometimes explicitly subordinated to the

value of "friendship": "If my best friend asked me something, I felt morally obliged and, in fact, preferred to compromise with my formal duties rather than break our relationship," said an interviewee (Ledeneva, 1998, p. 155). Another claimed, "The Russian mentality is oriented toward personalizing one's contacts. . . . In Russia, formalities never meant more than personal relations. It is a country which is *governed by mores rather than laws*" (p. 84).

This, it is argued here, is much less a distinct trait of a specific "Russian mentality," though, but rather a fairly typical expression of any culture based on a strong interpersonal logic of reasoning and meaning making. The same logic is visible in a Soviet business leader's question to one of his subordinates quoted by economic historian Stephan Merl (2010, p. 274): "Who is the boss—us or the law?" The businessman's explicit mention of the two alternatives of personal versus legal authority indicates that the two are not perceived as identical anymore, as it was the case in the lifeworld of most 19th-century Russian clerks. They have now become differentiated and, thus, at least to some extent, subject to individual decision making.

In this regard, second, Ledeneva (1998) has uncovered an interesting ambivalence in her respondents' reasoning around blat phenomena, which can be interpreted as evidence of a certain change in cognition, reflexivity, and meaning making around social institutions and one's own role as a citizen. She found that respondents' answers often showed symptoms of a "bad consciousness" with regard to their own blat practices. Ledeneva relates this to the fact that "blat gifts were used for the construction of small social worlds. . . . The public side of such inner solidarity is a group egoism, when one's own circle is considered superior to any other" (pp. 150, 153, 163).

As a result of her respondents' growing awareness of these antisocial consequences of the logic of reciprocity on a broader level, they often came up with excuses, rationalizations, and justifications for their own behavior (Ledeneva, 1998). For example, they described *blat* as a universal phenomenon, while asserting that they themselves had nothing to do with it, thereby implicitly questioning its moral qualities: "In my case, it is not *blat*, it is something else" (p. 65); "for me it was not *blat*, it was help" (p. 156); "a favor is not illegal" (p. 26); and so forth.

Statements such as "everyone does this" or "it doesn't do damage to anyone" equally indicate that the respective practices are evaluated, if not as illegal (and not as bad as corruption), then at least as somehow illegitimate. The Soviets clearly felt that bribery was a worse form of corruption than a small-scale use of public resources for private ends (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 259). However, this implicit moral condemnation of blat did not result in changes of behavior. Ledeneva has therefore coined the term "misrecognition game" for the use of similar excuses. In result of this practice of "gaming the system," Soviet society was characterized by a number of ostensible paradoxes: "Informal practices are intrinsically ambivalent in their functions: they both serve the regime and the people, while simultaneously undermining the regime and corrupting the people" (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 260). Ledeneva therefore speaks of "corruption with a human face," meaning that there are different degrees of corruption, that "ranking" it has to take into account the nature of the respective regime and society, and that in Soviet Russia "the severity of laws is compensated for by their nonobservance" (p. 260).

This article aims at showing that the mentioned paradoxes[4] are paradox only from a more complex, systemic point of view that looks at them from a critical distance. Arguably, this was probably not the perspective of the average Soviet citizen—otherwise, these practices would have changed or gradually disappeared. Researchers have come up with a number of interpretations for the widespread character of blat, clientelism, and corruption in the Soviet Union. Most of them are correct and convincing explanations from a system(at)ic perspective.[5]

[4] Ledeneva lists six more "paradoxes of socialism," all of which are linked to informal practices: No unemployment but nobody works. [Absenteeism]. "Nobody works but productivity increases. [False reporting]. Productivity increases but shops are empty. [Shortages]. Shops are empty but fridges are full. [*Blat*]. Fridges are full but nobody is satisfied. [Unfair privileges]. Nobody is satisfied but all vote unanimously. [Cynicism]." And, considering the end of the regime, "Everybody voted unanonimously, but the system has collapsed anyway (Ledeneva, 2014, p. 15)."

[5] Pleines (2001, p. 155f.) explains them as a "consequence of weak institutions," Ledeneva (1998), inversely, as a "reaction of normal people to structural constraints." Stephan Merl (2011) interprets the size of the black economy as constructional fault of the system—and, at the same time, a condition for its endurance, as official structures were unable to provide the necessary goods and services.

Although most scientists propose functionalist explanations, such as interpreting informal practices as pragmatic responses to a malfunctioning system, or even, ex post, as functionally necessary for its survival (Ledeneva, 2009; Merl, 2010), they describe—and thus remain inside—the logic of the Soviet system itself. Yet the question remains open of why, on the one hand, people continued to practice behaviors they ultimately deplored, and why, on the other hand, the system finally did not survive. At this point, cognitive developmental theory takes a more distanced structural and more differentiated perspective that can account for the supposed paradoxes in a coherent way.

As to the first question, the fact that one's own contribution to the functioning of a system is faded out of conscious awareness is an indicator of either weak or missing systematic (MHC Stage 12) reasoning structures. For a stable systematic (Kohlberg Stage 4) action, logic would argue that laws need to be (strictly) obeyed in order to ensure the working of the system and to avoid breakdown and chaos. By the way, this rule-bound logic did exist in the Soviet period, for instance, among loyal and ideologically convinced communists. It is documented in statements such as "true Soviet citizens don't use *blat*" (Ledeneva, 1998, p. 116). Nevertheless, rule-based behavior generally was not viewed as particularly smart, as can be seen in the slightly derogatory comment of a woman whose husband was rather loyal to the system: "He was a communist and didn't get involved in all this. He couldn't make deals" (Ledeneva, 1998, p. 137). Being smart, in contrast, meant to engage in practices of "beating the system," that is, of "creatively manipulating" its rules in order to get one's own interests met. Although this might appear as a rather egocentric strategy from more complex perspectives, it is indeed a form of rational behavior. Moreover, it is the standard mode of reasoning described by (older) rational choice theories as that of the so-called *homo oeconomicus*, who is mainly interested in maximizing his own profit or personal advantage. However, this mode of reasoning demands the ability to coordinate only two abstract variables: one's own short-term interest and possible sanctioning mechanisms of the system that one tries to escape. It does not, in turn, contextualize this behavior or consider its more long-term implications on a systemic level, that is, ask to what degree this rationality can be generalized as a moral principle or behavioral rule in a larger context—in other words, what would happen to society if everyone behaved like this? It thus falls short of the typical mode of meaning making of Kohlberg's rule-oriented reasoning logic or MHC Systematic Stage 12.[6]

However, given that rationalizations as the ones cited in this section are typical of formal (MHC Stage 11) reasoning, the culture of informal practices and the system that emerged on its basis show a certain development of the dominant logic of reasoning compared with prerevolutionary Russia. Different from tsarist officers who were proud of their good clientelistic relations and the gifts they received, the majority of Soviet respondents interviewed about blat networks clearly demonstrated a certain ambivalence in view of practices that contradicted Soviet laws.

This increase in complexity can again be explained on the basis of adult development theory. Given that the Soviet Union actively promoted and actually achieved radical improvements in alphabetization and formal education, there is reason to assume that the general level of cognition of average citizens probably moved from abstract (MHC Abstract Stage 10) to formal operations (MHC Stage 11), the first reasoning level able to recognize contradictions between two abstract categories (such as private interest and professional duty). At the same time, even if cognition and moral reasoning had developed beyond Kohlberg's interpersonal level (Stage 3), it was generally not yet systematic, rule-based reasoning (Kohlberg's Stage 4 or MHC Stage 12). This limitation can also be explained by looking at Soviet educational policies. As a matter of fact, although Soviet politics actively promoted general scientific and technological education and development, the Soviet Union understandably had little interest in equally supporting late or even postconventional moral reasoning in the population, as this would have been an invitation to critically reflect on certain Soviet rules and practices on the basis of higher, universal principles. If a major-

[6] Kohlberg (1981; Commons, 2008) a discussion of Adam Smith's ideas about the market would be interesting but is unfortunately beyond the limits of this article.

ity of citizens had actually been reasoning at systemic stage (MHC Stage 12), the system might have been seriously questioned. If they had reflected and publicly discussed the systemic implications of informal behavior and other contradictions within Soviet life, the formal system might even have collapsed. In fact, this was exactly what happened in result of the Soviet dissidents' strategy in the 1970s: They delegitimized the regime by publicly uncovering its inner contradictions, as well as its multiple discrepancies between ideology and practice. So even if a number of citizens did perform at MHC Systematic Stage 12 or higher, and a small number of citizens also translated those logics of reasoning into action, the "moral majority" and political culture as such remained in a rather (early) conformist, interpersonal mode of meaning making.

This leads us back to the initial question concerning whether the Soviet Union was a modern state, system, and society. Even though an evaluation of the extensive academic debate about "Soviet modernity" (as part of the "multiple modernites" perspective), as well as a more detailed analysis of Soviet institutional practice are beyond the scope of this article, structural adult development theory can contribute a number of nonarbitrary criteria for developing clearer definitions and distinctions around the concept of "modernity." Admittedly, definitions are always arbitrary. Still, I argue that for evaluating a society's progress in terms of "positive socio-cultural development," complexity criteria such as the degree of differentiation and (re-)integration of different spheres of socioeconomic and cultural life must be an essential ingredient.

It is quite clear that some elements of (Western) modernity have been consequently implemented in the Soviet Union, for example, overcoming traditional values and institutions in the domains of religion, gender roles, or social stratification. Yet this often happened by replacing old orthodoxies with new ones instead of allowing for more plurality and, thus, an integration of more differentiation in a larger, more complex model of organizing social relations. Other (early) modern institutions such as systems of governance and control were in place, while mainly serving the interest of the respective power holders. At the same time, more independent systems of checks and balances serving higher principles such as individual freedom or civic rights did not exist. Finally, some of the "modernity standards" set by Weber, like the logics of competition, professionalism, formalized (i.e., impersonal and transparent) institutions and procedures, as well as an open, rational, and self-critical public and scientific discourse, formally did exist in the Soviet Union, but were again limited by, and thus subordinated to, the political and ideological priorities of the respective party leadership.

So although the Soviet project clearly set out as a modern one, this was implemented by a political culture that was unable to construct systems that could integrate and successfully deal with the typical problems, behaviors, and inconsistencies of formal action logics in a nonarbitrary way. The next section looks at the question of to what extent these limitations have been overcome after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sketching the changes of social relations and of phenomena of clientelism, patronage, and corruption in post-Soviet Russia, it asks to what degree we can observe another increase of developmental complexity of culture and cognition in Russia's most recent history.

Post-Soviet Russia

> Loyalty plays a central role in Russian society; close relations in relatively small networks of friendship, preserved by everyday communication, shape daily life and large parts of working life.
>
> —Gabowitsch (2013, p. 49)

> The Russian Federation is defect. . . . The state has failed in its function as a state. . . . Regional administrations behave like deadly parasites. . . . [They] collaborate with regional "robber barons", indistinguishable from executive power. . . . Only unsatisfied groups of patronage are able to remove a leader or a ruling group.
>
> —Kotkin (2000).

The end of the Soviet Union was another important break causing substantial changes in political, economic, institutional, and cultural dimensions of social life. At the same time, this break was less radical than it appears in several respects. Moreover, it had been prepared by developments in late Soviet society and its inconsistencies, some of which have been analyzed here (see the example of *blat*).

Different from Merl's functionalistic view of blat as an element that made the Soviet system work, Alena Ledeneva also stresses its inner

inconsistencies; because blat practices undermined state planning, they also weakened the state itself (Ledeneva, 2006, pp. 5, 36).[7] Ledeneva claims that the widespread use of blat promoted the emergence of a market economy in the late Soviet Union. This is convincing at least inasmuch as the formal logic of reasoning is compatible with both blat and *homo oeconomicus* behavior. In view of the period of post-Soviet transition, she wrote, "Market mechanisms have to some extent replaced *blat* transactions, but *blat* is proving to be durable" (Ledeneva, 2006, p. 4). Today, it is "better to have 100 roubles than 100 friends" (p. 4). But to what extent was the liberalization and capitalization of the state-directed economy also accompanied by a transformation of culture and the development of structurally more complex orders of cognition able to inform and sustain more complex social, economic, and political institutions?

In the post-Soviet period, we again observe both considerable continuities and certain complexity developments, not all of which went into the same direction, though. Russian leadership has indeed often declared its intention to introduce democracy and market economy and officially subscribed to an agenda of "modernization" since 1991, thus indicating its willingness to overcome important Soviet legacies in principle. But it soon became clear that a clear break with the Soviet past was lacking political support (Fein, 2007). Therefore, institutional reforms again remained rather formal. Because large parts of the old political and economic elites remained in place (Kryshtanovskaya, 2008), so did their values, reasoning structures, and patterns of behavior. Consequently, widespread cultural practices of interaction continued to shape social, political, and economic life. This is also true for clientelism, patronage, and various forms of corruption. Similar to late Soviet efforts to combat corruption under Gorbachev, there have been a number of demonstrative shots in this direction by both presidents Yeltsin and Putin. But academic observers doubt that Russian political leadership has ever been seriously interested in consequent measures against corruption. Instead, they state the continuity of clientelistic practices in both politics and economics (Pleines, 2001, p. 155f.). Ledeneva's (1998) observation that "every enterprise or organization is first of all a person and his contacts" (p. 172) remains true in post-Soviet Russia, where "every administrator would backup his staff, because he knows if he does not, the day comes when he himself will have to rely on someone else's support" (p. 105). In these circumstances, it is unlikely that corruption will be seriously persecuted or even reported.

Whereas Yeltsin's regime officially tried to head toward Western-type rules and institutions, the spheres of state and business de facto remained closely linked through networks of patronage. Empirically, this means that "different branches of the state apparatus protect different clients. As a rule, the side whose 'roof' is higher in the state hierarchy, wins" (Varese, 2001, p. 67). Many observers therefore continue to think of corruption and the direct exchange of services based on relations of mutual trust as the true organizational principle of Russian society. Pleines (1999) calls it "a well established system which operates much more smoothly than the regular state administration" (p. 179). Indeed, contemporaries continue to report that "life is impossible unless rules are broken" and that "ZIS: *Znakomstva I Svjazi* [acquaintances and relations] are a powerful way of approaching any problem" (Ledeneva, 2006, p. 15). In this sense, one can speak of the persistence of two parallel systems of rules and standards operating at the same time, or even as a system of "rules of breaking the rules" (Ledeneva, 2006, p. 14).

To what extent has this state of affairs changed when Vladimir Putin, a trained lawyer, came to power? In fact, proclamations of wanting to democratize and modernize the country, strengthen the rule of law, and so forth continue to be a standard element of official discourse. However, all of these terms soon adopted peculiar meanings in Putinist contexts. Governing by the rule of law took the shape of a strong state that increasingly uses the law as a tool to fight political competitors. The notion of "democracy" became garnished with specifiers such as

[7] In this perspective, successful state planning would have required a (more) stable Kohlberg Stage 4 (or MHC Stage 12) culture. However, the question remains open whether such a culture—if it had existed—would have established a planned economy, or rather, as it was the case in the West, a rule-based market economy offering more promising avenues of activity to the *homo oeconomicus*.

"souvereign," "managed," and so forth (Lipman, 2006; Surkov, 2006), indicating that Russian democracy was different from that in the West and should thus not be evaluated according to common, "Western" standards. And "modernization" came to be understood in a rather technical way (one of the faces of which was President Medvedev's omnipresent iPad). This was based on Putin's faith in "politechnology," the art of (almost mechanically) "steering" people through incentives appealing to their material self-interest (Gabowitsch, 2013, p. 63f.). Actually, Gabowitsch calls today's Russia a "neopatrimonial" and "neofeudal" state (p. 58), with practices such as kormlenie experiencing a revival in a different, capitalist environment (p. 61).

So even though there are no severe shortages anymore, the basic clientelistic character of political and economic decision making hardly changed. According to Ledeneva (2006, p. 109), "the maximum Putin could do was to replace Yeltsin's clientele with his own while the pattern of *krugovaia poruka* [collective responsibility, mutual personal dependence] persisted." However, despite the image of law and order cultivated by the current president, two rather different trends can be stated for Putinist Russia. The first is one of "negative development": Brutality and disrespect for the law (Gabowitsch, 2013, p. 26) have reached a new level and quality among a considerable number of political (including government) and social actors alike. As a matter of fact, parts of post-Soviet Russian society have come to develop rather harsh forms of interaction in certain spheres of political and economic life, with the legal system apparently unable (or unwilling) to effectively deal with this. Various personal accounts document how Putin's Russia functions behind the scenes of a "strong state" (see also Wagner & Fein, 2016a, 2016b). The importance of informal connections and networks of protection, particularly in view of doing business in Russia, has been described, for example, in Varese's study on the Russian mafia:

> After I rented these premises, restoration works started. One day, a young lad comes in, looks around and says: "You will need protection." I hesitate and shortly afterward my car is burned. At that point, a refined gentleman comes forward and tells me: "Those young lads who offered you protection are just naughty boys. Let us handle the matter." I am afraid so I pay. The gentleman visits me again. "I see that restoration works are going rather slowly. If you wish, I could send in my crew." I agree. The fee (*tangente*) increases, but the restoration works actually improve. After a month, the gentleman comes again: "Do not you need credit?" To tell you the truth, I did. He recommends a bank, and so we became partners, so to speak. Better to make some profit, rather than none at all. (Varese, 2001, p. 69)[8]

These strategies of "gaming the market" can be found in many different forms, the worst of which certainly being brutalized actions against competitors, often executed by hired thugs. Sources cited by Varese mention price lists for either having a competitors' property destroyed or themselves physically attacked (Varese, 2001, 90f.; see also Ledeneva, 2009, p. 277f.). He even reports the case of a business man who "preferred to have his partner killed instead of buying him out. . . . It turned out to be cheaper to order a hit rather than to pay what the partner was entitled to" (Varese, 2001, p. 70). So the problem of a legal culture incompatible with the rule of law and democratic institutions remains. Despite existing formal rules and institutions, Russian society, to a considerable extent, continues to live by double standards.

Again, the question arises as to how these developments can be explained and evaluated. And to what extent can they be attributed to corresponding trends and developments in the area of cognition? Given the more open and largely globalized contemporary environment, it appears hard to believe that the average member of Russian society should have decreased in cognitive complexity. Nonetheless, Ledeneva (2006) speaks of a "continuity of a legal culture grounded in fear and disrespect"[9] combined with a "rebirth of the most archaic social relations" (p. 112). Other social scientists claim that Russia is a weak, failed, or hybrid state (www.euromaidan.com; Goble, 2004) with a defect, delegated, or pseudo democracy (Stoner-Weiss, 2009, p. 253), and an incoherent set of rules that it does not enforce, thereby forcing everyone to violate them (Pleines, 1999, p. 186f.; Ledeneva,

[8] He also gives more details as to what such a "roof" generally offers (pp. 98ff., 117f.). A respondent explains, "What can you ask your 'roof' to do for you? In principle everything, even asking them to beat up your wife's lover" (p. 117).

[9] According to a study mentioned by Varese, individual businessmen are much more afraid of state arbitrariness than average citizens (Varese, 2001, p. 87).

2006, pp. 13, 114, 195). These observations are certainly true, yet insufficient as an explanation.

A developmentally informed perspective on political culture and leadership might argue with Chilton (1988, p. 88) that institutions "will regress to less developed forms unless the institution's structure is preserved by people at the appropriate stage." Now, because the "democratic" institutions introduced in the early 1990s meanwhile came to function according to structurally less complex, largely interpersonal (Stage 3) or MHC Formal Stage 11 action logics, this would call for a more thorough look at those people who actually run important institutions in Russia. Whereas a sufficiently detailed analysis of the political and economic elite goes beyond the scope of this article, there are indications that certain behaviors stem from rather low complexity action logics. A business man preferring "to have his partner killed instead of buying him out" (Varese, 2001, p. 70) likely performs on the basis of action logics called "preconventional" by Kohlberg (Stages 1 and 2) and "concrete" (Stage 9 or lower) by the MHC. On these stages, neither law nor honor function as abstract guiding values, and only the raw power of quasi-feudal war or business lords governs behavior. Where similar practices are possible on a larger scale with impunity, one has to speak of a competing pattern of governance that at least undermines the functioning of the formally existing more complex system of rules. By publicly subscribing to a political identity—and corresponding action—which sees Russia threatened by democratic movements and political critique, president Putin reproduces patterns of reasoning and policymaking typical of former Soviet and KGB conceptions, which are most likely based on a self-defensive identity and logic of meaning making (cf. Fein, 2010; for a more detailed analysis of Putin's leadership, see also Fein & Wagner, 2016a, 2016b). In this context, it is extremely difficult for more complex approaches to gain momentum. Another relevant aspect in this regard is media and educational politics. Although independent media have been increasingly hampered, in favor of a streamlined public opinion, since Putin has come to power, educational politics have started to support "patriotic awareness" rather than critical political thinking.

Nevertheless, more complex political perspectives do exist and have in fact become stronger, not least as a result of the de facto regression of official politics under Putin (Erdman & Kneuer, 2011). This is the second, more positive development in the most recent history of Russian political culture. Mischa Gabowitsch has provided a comprehensive overview of the political movements and initiatives that have emerged on a quantitatively larger basis (at least in Russia's big cities) as a result of Putin's third presidential campaign. As a matter of fact, one of their main motivations was anger about Putin's unabashed strategies of manipulating the electoral process, accompanied by considerable unclarities, limitations of political competition, and outright violations of electoral laws. More and more, well-educated citizens, often fluent in foreign languages and more or less familiar with political practices and developments outside of Russia, suddenly started to claim their right to be taken seriously as citizens. For them, this meant first and foremost to demand that laws be obeyed, that equal chances and a fair process be granted to all, and that state institutions operate according to transparent impersonal rules (Gabowitsch, 2013, p. 67). Thanks to the new social media, cases of manipulation before and during the elections became immediately known to a large network of activists. This motivated more and more citizens, many of whom had hitherto not been politically active or even interested, to join the grassroots movement of election observers emerging in all corners of the country. "Simple Russians" such as Kira Sokolova started to stand up against "political lies" and in favor of "truth and morality" (quoted in Gabowitsch, 2013, p. 37) and to take ownership of the destiny of their country. The fact that election observance became a kind of "popular sport," so to speak (p. 104), is a clear sign of a culture of observing impersonal abstract rules gaining momentum within the population. This culture now understood rules as instruments in service of higher principles such as equality and fairness, and thus, ultimately, civic dignity (Kohlberg Stage 4 or higher; MHC Stage 12 or higher).

Outstanding figures of the political opposition such as liberal Boris Nemtsov (assassinated in February 2015) and blogger Aleksei Navalny are other examples of citizens taking responsibility based on the quest for "clean politics,"

transparent institutions, and impersonal justice. Both of them played leading roles in uncovering cases of corruption by state bodies. Nemtsovs report on the results of Putin's rule, among them Putin's military activities, and Navalny's multiple postings against cases of wasting taxpayer money by corrupt functionaries disseminated online have sensitized tens of thousands of fellow countrymen in view of the impacts of the persistent "sistema" of double standards.[10] Although a more thorough analysis of these movements is beyond the limits of this article, they indicate that Russian society is a much more differentiated and plural entity today. It is made up of several distinct political (sub)cultures, with their specific logics of reasoning, meaning making, and behavior operating at quite different levels of complexity and thus promoting rather different visions of future sociopolitical development.

Although clientelistic and corrupt practices continue to be an inherent element of the ruling class' "normal way to get things done," the new protest movement demands that Russia catch up with European standards of democracy, transparency, human rights, and, in particular, the rule of law. From a developmental perspective, it is quite understandable that the latter are perceived as a threat by the former and thus fought with considerable energy (Gabowitsch, 2013, p. 101), for not only do independent movements undermine state control—independently thinking, self-actualizing citizens also question what a self-defensive political culture is identified with: the truth of the self-protective worldview and the stability of the castle it has built around itself.

Summary, Discussion, and Concluding Remarks

This article has proposed empirical illustrations of a how a developmentally based, culture-free theory of corruption can help to better understand phenomena of clientelism, patronage, and corruption in different historical and cultural contexts. Drawing on examples from three different periods of Russian history, it has inquired into the changing relations between individual cognition and reasoning, widespread social practices, the dominant cultural patterns of meaning making, and the character and functioning of institutions they have shaped.

To sum up, this article has shown that both culture and cognition, in their respective contextual settings, are relevant for explaining the emergence of "corrupt" phenomena, attitudes toward them, and ways of dealing with them in different historical periods. Moreover, it has shown that, on the one hand, contextual, that is, historical and cultural, factors either support or do not support cognitive development. On the other hand, values and patterns of thinking co-determine the ways in which social interaction takes place and in which social and political institutions operate in a particular historical setting.

In a nutshell, it has been argued that increasing complexity of cognitive and cultural patterns within a society leads to higher individual and collective (self-)reflexivity. This, in turn, generates more complex institutions that tend to criminalize, combat, and ultimately prevent corruption as development proceeds.

More precisely, my metasystematic, developmentally informed analysis and interpretation can account for the changing role of corruption in Russian history in the following ways:

1. Tsarist Russia appears as a classical case of a traditional society facing the challenges of modernization in both cultural and institutional respects. Given the educational (and, thus, cognitive) situation, it is not surprising that Russian reformers from the 1860s on had a difficult time implementing abstract systems of impersonal administration and rule, and convincing the existing strata of local administrators and clerks of their value.
2. Although Soviet Russia has indeed progressed toward and implemented early modern forms of rationality, practices, and institutions, namely, those based on formal reasoning, it fell short of putting into place mature systematic stage institutions and principles. These, in fact, would probably not have been compatible with the power claims of the Communist regime.
3. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of cognition and the dominant culture probably did not simply proceed smoothly toward the next more com-

[10] See also Partija Narodnoj Svobody (2011).

plex, systematic stage, because a clear sociopolitical consensus as to the goals of the transformation was missing. In an environment of insecurity and lack of orientation, diverse, noncompatible interests competed for hegemony, some of which followed less complex, that is, more egocentric, agendas. It is therefore understandable that many social actors resorted to less complex action logics themselves in the face of the overwhelming challenges they had to cope with on all fronts of everyday life.

4. In this sense, it is not accurate to say that impersonal systems in today's Russia are "defect" (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 278). Rather, they have never fully developed in the first place due to a lack of sufficiently complex reasoning structures able to sustain them as a dominant culture. Moreover, their nonexistence only looks like a "defect" from more complex perspectives, which are used to have systematic stage cultures and institutions in place and functioning for many decades.
5. So even though a general developmental progress of cognition and culture can be observed during the period analyzed here, post-Communist Russia still does not meet the modernity standards set by Weber. This is due to a missing systematic-stage political culture, which neither the Soviet nor the post-Soviet Russian government was interested in fostering. This also explains the difficulty of modern type (systematic-level) democratic institutions to take root in Russia.

This developmentally based analysis goes beyond widespread functionalist (systemic) accounts, which often remain rather descriptive or follow a circular logic, due to a missing metasystematic perspective.[11] Even though they generally describe the systemic context and the dominant rationality correctly, they tend to fail to adequately grasp the interrelations between them. Developmentally informed, metasystematic (MHC Stage13) perspectives, in turn, take into account cognitive, cultural, and contextual systems in their own right. Due to their sensibility for "cultures inside cultures" and their emergent qualities, the interactions between systems can be revealed more appropriately. In other words, metasystematic approaches look at the multiple inner dynamics and interactions between cognitive, sociocultural, and institutional systems as they shape social realities. They can thus explain and relativize specific cognitive-cultural logics of meaning making as products—and cocreators—of their specific context.

For instance, the previous analysis has made clear why what one cultural system considers as "honor" (Kohlberg Stage 3) is "corruption" in the eyes of another (Kohlberg Stage 4 and higher). It shows that honor (as an anthropological constant) means different things in cultures of different cognitive complexity. And it explains why corruption as a problem only starts to exist when reciprocal (Stage 3) and rule-oriented (Stage 4 and higher) cultures of reasoning and their respective action logics meet—or clash.

In more general terms, sociologists of structural adult development have often found that the development of culture lacks behind individual development, in particular, that of the most developed individuals inside a given culture (Chilton, 1988). This is because a society and its institutions can only operate on the basis of the existing workforce and citizenry. Although advanced reasoners may invent or even introduce new institutions, the cognitive capacities necessary to run and sustain those institutions generally does not develop—and cannot be developed—overnight.

This seems to be the challenge that Russia is currently facing with the project of introducing modern-type democracy and the rule of law, for if more complex institutions are introduced for the first time in the history of a particular society, the complexity structure of reasoning and action necessary to sustain them (Kohlberg's Stage 4 or MHC Systemic Stage 12) has to be consciously adopted or developed by mainstream culture. This means, first, that leadership needs to actively practice and promote it (which is currently not the case; see Fein & Wagner, 2016a, 2016b) in order to help the broad population to gradually internalize it through continuous practice over a signifi-

[11] See, for example, Ledeneva's claim: My research shows that informal practices, especially those based on interaction between public administration and business or banking services, are essential for the operation of both the formal and informal economy and for compensating for the defects of impersonal systems of trust in Russia. (Ledeneva, 2009, p. 278)

cant period of time. Only then can impersonal institutions start to operate according to the complexity demands they are conceived and constructed for. This is even more so in Russia, where there is no substantial pressure from the outside, in contrast to what has been the case in postwar Germany, for example.

In fact, adult development perspectives also help to understand why and how phenomena of clientelism and corruption coexist with rule-oriented cultures. They exist in all known systems, including so-called developed societies, in part because their members are always unequally developed. However, in modern societies, they are not the dominant cultures anymore.

To conclude, what are possible avenues and perspectives for future development of politics and political culture in Russia? Currently, although a political will to promote complexity development in society seems to be completely lacking on the level of leadership, the social basis of systematic thinking does grow continuously. In this sense, pressure from within increasingly forces Russian leadership to either strengthen its mechanisms of control or repression, or to gradually make changes allowing for more pluralism and complexity in political life. At the same time, the recent conflict involving Crimea and Ukraine has caused additional pressure on Russian leadership from the outside. Because, according to adult development theory, the importance of adequate support can hardly be overestimated as a condition for positive development, this situation provides opportunities for "friendly pressure" if intelligently used, for experience shows that alternative systems of reasoning and rules can challenge and ultimately start to change the systems they are embedded in. This is so especially if they take an evolutionary approach, that is, if they invite and actively support further development instead of condemning less complex structures for their shortcomings. What this could mean in practice opens up meaningful avenues for future research.

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