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„Something is Rotten in the State of Montenegro –
The Perception of Corruption by Civil Actors in Montenegro
and its Impacts on their Relationships with the State and the EU"

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Gewidmet ist diese Arbeit Ida, Kimba und meiner Tochter. <3

Well, did you hear there's a natural order?
Those most deserving will end up with the most?
That the cream cannot help but always rise up to the top?
Well, I say, 'Shit floats.'

If you thought things had changed –
friend, you'd better think again.
Bluntly put, in the fewest of words.
Cunts are still running the world,
Cunts are still running the world.

— Jarvis Cocker, Running the World[1]

She was already learning that if
you ignore the rules people will,
half the time, quietly rewrite them
so that they don't apply to you.

— Terry Pratchett, Equal Rites[2]

[1] Cocker, Jarvis. 2011. Mother, Brother, Lover. Selected Lyrics. Faber and Faber, London.
[2] Pratchett, Terry. 1987. Equal Rites. Corgi Books, London.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption has become a popular topic connected to the public sector and political life. In my research I argue that this connection is oftentimes fostered on behalf of external geopolitical players in Montenegro. This thesis is an ethnographic study about corruption and its perception among the civic sector and attached activists in Montenegro. Corruption constitutes a prominent topic in the academic debate about Montenegro and the Western Balkans ever since they have become categorised as post-socialist (Holmes 2006; Horvat and Štiks 2015; Segert 2013). The country's levels of corruption are under intense scrutiny because of its desire to join the European Union (EU) as a member state. The accession negotiations are spanning already over more than a decade and Montenegro is seen as one of the frontrunners of the region by policy makers and journalists inside and outside the country (Institut Alternativa 2018; URL 1). Although the EU attests Montenegro a solid progress in general, it does urge the country to show greater effort especially in the areas of anti-corruption policy and the impartiality of the judicial system.

That corruption is still an issue, indeed, shows the so-called *envelope affair*, a major corruption scandal that came to light in 2019. A video from 2016 surfaced that shows the then-mayor of Podgorica receiving an envelope with a large amount of money inside to support and fund the election campaign of the ruling party (URL 2-4). What is interesting in this case is that, even though it hardly had any consequences for the parties involved, it triggered the *Odupri Se* movement. It was an explicitly civic protest movement that's intensive phase lasted half a year from early 2019 onwards. Many people that work for critical NGOs followed the movement and were part of the protests on the street.

The protesters of this movement and the people generally active in the civic sector, including professionals in the NGO sector, are the people I worked with to collect my data; the research question for the thesis is *How do NGOs in Montenegro and civic activists perceive corruption?* The decision to choose these two groups of people derives from the assumption that they are practically united by being generally interested in politics, and in my case corruption, and yet have different approaches and connections to it. The different approaches here mean the level of professionalism in the sector. While many people that work in NGOs have received academic training in political science or affiliated subjects, the civic society overall is not only comprised of professionals. In the thesis I have drawn a distinction between the people that

earn their money and are professionally tied to organisations in the civic sector and people that operate on a voluntary and independent principle.

1.1. Methodology

Around a dozen semi-structured, narrative interviews represent the base of this study. By letting my interview partners talk rather freely about corruption and related mechanisms in an anecdotal manner, I was able to identify themes they closely link to corruption. Several of these key themes are dissected in the course of the thesis. I argue that through these interviews, connections between the individual's stories about corruption and the relationship between Montenegro and the European Union are discernible. The anecdotes and stories my interview partners had told me about the roots of corruption, the current state of affairs and where the crux of the whole matter lies, provided me with different strands of narrative I was able to work with to find answers for the research question. In order to make my approach more tangible and to exemplify the intended connections, this is a quote that encapsulates a clear image of backwardness of Montenegro vis-à-vis the rest of Europe. Again, I argue that this image is the product of a discourse that European powers and the EU in particular, has used to establish primacy in the realms of morality, democracy, and politics. Bogdan, my interview partner and the originator of the following quote, takes a historical approach to show intellectual deficits that can never be overcome:

> *It's 21st century. No, it's not. Not here. Here* [Europe]*, people know how to write two or three centuries before Michelangelo was painting and Leonardo made Monalisa in 15th century, and here [Montenegro] people learned how to write in 19th century. So you have four centuries advantage, we cannot catch that up so easily*. (T8, 171)

Corruption serves multiple purposes in the research setup. Firstly, it allows the anecdotal, personal stories to speak to a larger context. By recognising corruption, and related informal mechanisms, to having an impact on their individual everyday life and their group's past, present and future, my interview partners offered insights into their understanding of the system they live in. They provided explanations for both the social organisational level of kinship ties as well as the larger political system. A cautious balancing whether or not acts are morally disdained was done on the part of my interview partners. Furthermore, the analysis of their well-known system through the lens of corruption indicates striking similarities in the

perception between the small-scale kinship system and the larger political system. Moral evaluation criteria were readily adopted, as were certain fragments of language and metaphors. The morality they are judged with can be referred to as situative and depending on the relation to the person in question. The same deeds of corruption can be perceived and judged contrarily, depending on an existing relationship and whether one stands on the receiving end or not (de Sardan 1999, 35). Not just the individual is regarded, however, normally illegitimate acts can be rendered morally appropriate if they are to the benefit of the group (Heywood 2015, 189).

Secondly, the concept of corruption in etic terms is submitted to an inspection. Because it is such a prevalent term in policy making and rating systems, this thesis follows many others and finds the etic version of the concept insufficient (e.g. Herzfeld 2018; Torsello 2015). While the emic application of corruption, as used in the previous paragraph, shows a distinguished quality for the progress in understanding of social life, the etic concept offers little help to understanding, but rather disregards social life and produces its own reality. The underlying theoretical basis for this thesis is Michael Herzfeld's theory of cultural intimacy. In his theory, he shows that corruption, among other things, can provide for a negative identification and solidifies group boundaries. The limits of the groups are then set between the ones who have knowledge of the intimate, yet embarrassing workings and secrets, and the ones who do not have that same knowledge (Herzfeld 2016). The anecdotal stories my interview partners have shared with me have been either experienced by them or passed on to them. Even though some of the stories, especially the ones that happened in the far-away past, might have been altered over time, the stories seem to have something important to them, else they would have been forgotten. Herzfeld argues that such stories offer identification for the individual but are not willingly told because of their embarrassing characteristic.

1.2. Montenegro, History and the EU

Those stories can then be linked to a self-portrait of their own group by my interview partners and show a possible presence of preconceptions. I suggest that these preconceptions are a result of the relationship their country and the European Union are having since the demise of Yugoslavia. To pursue this argument, any prejudices officials of European bodies have had in the past vis-à-vis Montenegro, its predecessor states, or the other countries in the Western Balkans are part of a discursive structure that inevitably shapes the present and future of

relationships with the country (Petrović 2015, 104). This discursive structure not only dictates the relationship between the European Union and Montenegro, but also has an enormous impact on the relationship between Montenegro and its citizens. In the light of this background, its empirical approach allows the thesis to show the discursive power the EU establishes in the enlargement process.

The relevance of this thesis stems from the examination of civic actors and NGOs in a country that is in the midst of accession negotiations with a larger political body. Yason Jung investigated the civic sector of another post-socialist country soon after its entry into the European Union, namely Bulgaria (Jung 2010). Both, the present contribution and Jung's study take the accession to the EU as a watershed in the countries' political history. In his study, the NGO sector slowly tries to find its own ideas and to emancipate itself from the European Union's control. Jung shows the fine line the actors walk to maintain the financial support and to still keep the EU at an arm's length. In this thesis, on the other hand, the NGO sector has a single, clear adversary in the form of the elite circles surrounding the Montenegrin government. The Montenegrin civic sector proactively supports the EU and its requirements in the different areas such as judicial system and rule of law to put pressure on their government to change for the better. While the people in the NGO sector do not have a uniformly positive picture about the EU, they do have a uniformly negative picture about their current government. Hence, they submit to the ideas of the EU outright to gain its support.

These discursive structures, however, build upon a long history, as I show in the thesis, of historically nurtured stereotypes of the region and geopolitical struggles. For a better comprehension of these prejudices and images the citizens themselves have concerning their own country and region, an overview about the allegedly most important events according to my interview partners is provided in a historical overview. Balkanist visions, that create clear hierarchies within Europe to the disadvantage of the people of the Balkan peninsula, have been shaping the discussion about the region ever since the 19th century (Todorova 2009). Corruption, with its ascribed informal and archaic character, in this thesis stands as substitute for many other stereotypical mechanisms that are no more common in the region than in Western Europe but are exaggerated there. Within the context of a neoliberal integration after the dissolve of Yugoslavia, these visions have evolved and again put the countries to the disadvantageous position. I believe that seeing the EU enlargement as a geopolitical project with neoliberal impetus and means helps to understand the relationship between

Montenegro and the European Union. The prejudices nurtured for a long time must seem like facts to many people and so they get consequently reinforced.

Since the interviews had the common denominator of corruption as an overall theme, my interview partners provided me with their coherent explanations why Montenegro has a supposedly higher rate of corruption than other countries. The answers either referred to a regional phenomenon, pointing to aforementioned balkanist ideas or delved into quintessentially Montenegrin national aspects. The question of the roots seems crucial as many historical topics such as the clan-based social organisational system that was in place at one point in some parts of Montenegro, the socialist cronyism structure of the second Yugoslavia, and the obscure workings of the new elites after the dissolve of Yugoslavia serve as explanations for the current situation for my interview partners. The choice of some of my interview partners to place their focus on the social organisation in pre-modern times must be seen in the light of the independence and the strong nationalistic work to delimit the young nation from Serbia. Brković tracked the negotiation process of the young nation in online forums after the independence and identified an *urge to re-write, to fill in, to recreate, to correct the history of Montenegro and the history of Montenegrin national belonging* (Brković 2009, 67).

Historical events and epochs take a prominent place in the reasoning of my interview partners and hence are dealt with. Especially the topic of clan-based organisation that is linked intrinsically to the attribution of backward stereotypes must be carefully approached, as not to reinforce any stereotypical images. While the transition away from a clan-based organisation happened much earlier than the state-building, this kind of artefact seems to play an important role in the narrative of the national Montenegrin identity (Calic 2019a). History for my interview partners also serves as a way to put things into perspective and as a supply for identity. This again works both with positive identification, for example being proud of one’s nation, and with negative one, through embarrassment in Herzfeld’s sense.

The specifically anthropological interest of this thesis derives from two distinct subject areas. For one thing, the thesis argues for the importance and necessity of individual's lifeworlds in the understanding of larger societal mechanisms. It disproves the picture of the lifeless structures that always work according to the rules and instead takes a processual and versatile approach towards formal and informal institutions (Brković 2009, 58). This study suggests that

every formal structure and institution has its informal portion or area and that the latter is significantly understudied in previous research. A symbiosis of both, the informal and the formal realm is needed to fully understand any structure. Another key issue that of this anthropological endeavour is the social organisation. Within the thesis, kinship takes an important role, as it is used on the one hand to calibrate one's moral compass, and on the other hand to humanise political manoeuvres. Through the problem-focused approach focusing on corruption, the thesis tries to demonstrate the power of discourse, and the imperative in policy to consider informal structures. Especially in a policy that strives to lessen inequality, this is of utmost importance.

1.3 Thesis Setup

The structure of this thesis roughly follows the steps in the research process. In the chapter *Methodology* (2), the way of working to produce this thesis is presented. At the start, the paradigm the whole thesis works with is explained, before the manner of collection of data is presented. Subsequently, the analysis strategy and research choices are outlined. What follows in the chapter *Historical Overview* (3) is an overview that starts in the 19th century and follows a chronological order until well into the 21st century. In this chapter, several key events and turning points in the region's and Montenegro's history are discussed and already connected to the data I was able to gather. Some of my activist interview partners take the streets in their effort to salvage what is left after thirty years of one party dominating, and the chosen addressee for their cry is not only their fellow Montenegrins, but the European Union. The next chapter *Corruption* (4) covers the assessment of corruption as an etic and emic concept and theoretically portrays several areas that are essential to my research endeavour. Finally, the theory of Herzfeld is more thoroughly talked about. In the chapter *Summary of Findings* (5), the data I collected is presented in a number of categories that respond to the earlier chapters. In the last chapter *Conclusion* (6), the results are condensed and conclude the overall process and findings of this project, what is learned and what might need to be examined further. In the *Appendix* (7), the bibliography as well as the list of internet sources and other sources can be found.

2. METHODOLOGY

The general outline of my research project is a social anthropological one. This entails a certain perspective on corruption that provides the research with insights that are very close to the idea of my interview partners. Anthropology can mean a multitude of things to the researcher, for the research project at hand it serves predominantly two purposes: to gain a specific outlook and way of understanding and as a point of departure for a political project. To add to the former, the discipline can serve as a way of understanding how certain social mechanisms of and in a community work (Kelly 2014, 8). That could serve as definition for just any social science. In my anthropological project the focal point stays the individual, although the larger societal context is of importance, too. The second thing anthropology is thought to be sometimes, and in this case applicable, is as a political project on its own. A project driven to carefully show and understand differences within groups and the ideas they compromise; and by extension, allow for complexity and diversity (ibid, 10). The merit an of an anthropological approach in this research process, and with respect to most sociological and political science projects, is the emic focus in the data. In particular, the data is stemming from the understanding of my interview partners.

To add to the anthropological outset, ideas and discourses of political scientists and historians are induced in the research design. The thesis therefore demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach that gained popularity in the humanities and the social sciences as a whole in recent years. This becomes most visible in the concurrent research method ranges of the disciplines. Anthropology, and especially one of *its* core research means, ethnography, became an important sort of indication that is conducted before larger research projects are realised. Especially as a precursor and foundation for quantitative tools it enjoys growing popularity (LeCompte & Schensul 2010, 4), as it tests the necessity of the study and the proposed ways to address a problem with the *examined*. An important aspect for of interdisciplinarity is the level and quality of integration of the different fields. The ethnography that anthropology brings to the table in form of a method is more of an outlook and scientific approach towards the research and the researcher. Without critical and thorough engagement with methods and theories from other disciplines, one can speak only about mere multidisciplinarity that only plainly adds layers instead of seeking for the value that a proper entanglement can yield (Medne & Muravska 2011, 81).

Another peculiarity of anthropology, namely the engagement with everyday interactions of people, has become relevant to other disciplines as well. Political scientist Dieter Segert (2015, 91) applauded Yurchak, an anthropologist who examined political rituals in late-socialist Russia, because he took a look at mundane things that political scientists would have never looked at or disregarded in their research projects, namely everyday performances of individuals. Anthropology lays special importance on the thoughts and life worlds of the people in question and hence generates a different set of knowledge than inquiries with surveys do that are often used in the other social sciences. In the chapter about corruption that follows later, the stark contrast to a normative approach in the political arena will be explained with regards to a theory. The normative approaches are very present in the academic discourse. This is because official institutions and large corporations have been working with this approach. I argue that by using anthropological theory, like the theory of cultural intimacy by Michael Herzfeld (2005), political processes can be brought back closer to the lives of people. In bringing the life worlds of people back into the picture, politics would get more humane.

2.1. Paradigm Choice

2.1.1. Transparency

Embracing transparency is one of the major ways to combat corruption. This transparency not only helps the public resources to be kept in check with the public interests, it also helps academia by offering traceability. To keep transparency afloat in this paper, in the following some foundational theoretical considerations will be spelled out that may not appear too relevant at first glance. Through the way and manner, one plans a research project and does reflections about the research, one already demarcates what can come out in the end; the transparency pursued here supports reproducibility as well. Even though a precise reproduction of steps in the research process, be it interviews, coming up with research questions or secondary literature reviews, is impossible, especially in qualitative research, the addressed topics serve for the reader and the scientific peers to fathom the circumstances and the story of the research that was conducted (Thin 2014, 42).

2.1.2. Interpretive-Critical Synthesis

From the outset, from the very first scratch, any research gets narrowed down conceptually. There are subsequent questions one has to answer, even before the research process; and as politician Nico Semsrott stated once: *Every decision is the death of billions of possibilities* (URL 5). The question sets are ontology, epistemology and methodology. For my research, I tried to synthesise two different paradigms, as LeCompte and Schensul portray them: The critical and interpretive paradigm. The research outset is a critical one, as I believe that my research can capture some sort of reality in a specific historical context and in a geographical setting (LeCompte & Schensul 2010, 63). Contrary to a critical stance, I assume the structures to be real insofar as they would be there without any research; lending some ideas from critical realism, a theoretical strand of social sciences from political scientists, this does not undermine a constructivist character of these structures and still allows for individual agency to change these very structures (Pühretmayer 2010, 14). My focus is on power relations, both between the individual and the social organisation and between the community, state, region and a broader international power network. Again, while acknowledging the reality as something outside the researcher, it is at the same time socially constructed and gets constantly re-negotiated between people; this negotiation process is a hallmark of an interactionist approach. For this, out of the array of interpretive approaches the interactionist approach is what comes closest to this research. In a way, the critical paradigm and the interpretive one in form of the interactionist approach are not so far from each other, as both examine socially patterned rules; while the critical approach takes a look at the history of these rules and how they position people in an wider net of power relationships, the interactionist takes up these rules and tries to understand how people produce meaning to reify those patterns or change them (LeCompte & Schensul 2010, 67-68). From the synthesis these approaches, this thesis aims to understand corruption as both, a means of meaning-making, as one of the pieces of a puzzle for people to make sense of the social organisational system they live in, and as part of a larger discourse about power, nation, orientalism and imagined regions.

The meaning-making properties of corruption are underlined in the hermeneutical approaches in ethnography that deal with the topic. Davide Torsello counts Akhil Gupta and Michael Herzfeld as the most influential researchers in that specific research strand, and both stand at the core of this thesis. In their view, corruption serves as a way for people to make

sense of politics and the state itself (Torsello 2015, 187). Herzfeld's theory of cultural intimacy functions as one the main sources of contemplation about corruption in this thesis. His theory tries to bring kinship back into political anthropology. He compares the concept of corruption within a state with incest in kinship terms. Both concepts, corruption and incest, *represent ways of damaging the collective interest in favor of more selfish concerns — concerns, moreover, that are never purely individual but inevitably also involve suborning others* (Herzfeld 2018, 39). In course of its development, social science, and anthropology alike, juxtaposed the modern state against a traditional kin-based political organisation.

This division was established to delimit oneself from a non-modern *Other* in a way. But anthropology has come a long way and has scrutinised this division and, as Herzfeld, rebuts it and rather sees kinship, the *traditional*, as deeply interwoven in the *modern*, and thus renders obsolete this dichotomy in a scientific debate. The analytical separation is still needed in course of a research process and many interlocutors also use this vocabulary, so it is not obsolete on the ground in any field site (Thelen and Alber 2018, 1-2). By using an anthropological approach that values the emic portrayals of my interview partners, concepts like *clan-based social organisation*, the dichotomy *traditional-modern*, among others, has to be taken into account. If concepts mean anything in the lives of the interview partners, they are a reality just as well.

The discursive properties of corruption can be seen in a variety of ways. For my research, the power relations that are inherent in the anti-corruption discourse will be viewed in detail. With international institutions like the OECD, Transparency International, World Bank and the EU combating corruption per se since the 1990s, those fights always have an agenda at their core. The major points of critique spelled out against anti-corruption is its cultural imperialist quality and the establishment of an anti-corruption industry that has vested interests (Holmes 2015, 130f). The normative character of these organisations is apparent, as they clearly want to be seen as the norm. The efficiency of these ventures are questionable, as most systematically corrupt countries have not made progress worth mentioning (Ledeneva 2018a, 418). Many works and studies on corruption get published within those organisations or with their funding and thus contribute to the large portion of normativity in the debate about corruption. A critical anthropological perspective allows to make visible power relations that are established on sometimes moral, sometimes economic grounds by virtue of superiority in terms of corruption.

2.1.3. The Data

The whole research process can be referred to as a qualitative approach, which has as aim to *understand, describe, and sometimes explain social phenomena 'from the inside' in a number of different ways* (Flick 2018, 5). From those different ways researchers choose methods that in turn derive from their research problem and their methodological stance. Now in qualitative research there are many equally important steps, each one with its own hurdles and details to adjust. The steps are roughly: Planning the research project, collecting the raw data, turning the raw data into a useable resource for the researcher, analysing data and processing it all into an understandable product, a master thesis in my case. The primary, raw data my thesis works with are eight interviews in person, a group interview, and another one digital, comprising 13 interviewees in total. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 to around 100 minutes each. Secondary data derived from papers and books from different disciplines, especially anthropology, political science, history, economics and sociology. The most important historical sources are two recent books of Marie-Janine Calic, one on the larger region of Southeastern Europe (Calic 2019a), the other a comprehensive history on the Yugoslav sphere (Calic 2019b). Additionally, a book from Holm Sundhaussen (2014) on the more recent history of Yugoslavia and its successor states and a volume edited by Konrad Clewing and Oliver Schmitt (2011) on the larger historical context of the region provide for a better historical foundation. Kenneth Morrison is a political scientist who engaged closely with Montenegro and studied different aspects of the young country. Apart from the publications on the political history (Morrison 2018a), he intensively researched nationalism and identity (Morrison 2018b) and wrote articles on political personalities like Milo Đukanović (Morrison 2009).

Another source of data that is quasi-scientific are publications of several institutions and NGOs in Montenegro, elsewhere labelled grey literature. *Institut Alternativa* is a thinktank based in Montenegro that publishes analyses of civil society matters like the quality of public administration, democratic awareness and social policy. They published around a dozen of reports in the last years[3]. The European Commission publishes a report on the progress of the Montenegro's path to join the European Union annually. I compared the reports over the years and made some observations about the relationship of the parties involved. Other NGOs

[3] https://institut-alternativa.org/en/ia/publications/

and organisations like the *World Bank*[4], *Transparency International*[5], *Freedom House*[6] and *Reporters Without Borders*[7] provided me with input to better contextualise my findings.

2.2. The Collection

The single most important question when doing interviews is deciding what kind of people or groups should be represented in the study. For my project it is focused around activists of the *Odupri Se* movement on the one hand and civil society organisations and NGOs on the other hand. The former was selected due to the circumstances of its establishment, namely as a reaction to the absence of legal consequences for a large and documented corruption scandal (URL 2-4). The civil society organisations and NGOs are of interest because they often have the fight of corruption, governance and accountability of the public sector as their prime areas of interest. The number of interviews is up to the researcher's evaluation, and as Roulston and Choi point out (2018, 244), every research can merely be partial and not everyone can or wants to be interviewed, so drawing the line between sufficient-insufficient becomes, as in my case, a matter of do-ability. There is only a limited time frame where research is conducted, in my case three weeks, and there is yet another time frame where institutions work and are open for interviews. The public side of institutional life is in a shutdown in some parts of summer. While I could conduct interviews with many activists over the whole period of my fieldwork, the interviews with institutions, NGOs and their employees have been scheduled at the end. At the end, a sufficient number of interviews were conducted to continue onwards in the research project.

2.2.1 Recruitment

The recruitment process for the interviews started well in advance of the actual fieldwork, as a part of the general, practical preparations for the research site. Using the official e-mail addresses of the institutions was my first attempt to reach out. With the institutions getting ready for their summer holidays, they did not respond as much as I hoped at first. To adapt to that circumstance, I continued and started e-mailing not the institutions themselves, but people that work there. The response rate grew, and some interviews could be arranged in

[4] https://www.worldbank.org/en/home
[5] https://www.transparency.org/en
[6] https://freedomhouse.org/
[7] https://rsf.org/en

advance. Reading publications and online blogs about the situation was not only helping me to get up to date to developments, but suggested persons whom I could contact, some of the blogs and articles even had contact details in them. Through this most of my interview partners from institutions were approached. Another useful communication channel was Facebook, as described in recent literature (Ditchfield & Meredith 2018, 497). Especially some people of the protest movement I could contact via the Facebook's messenger. After meeting an activist in the movement, a small snowball effect was showing, as the activist would connect me with their friends and peers and suggested people I should talk with.

As people knew Podgorica and its cafés better than me (most interviews were conducted in those cafés), I let them choose the location of the interviews. We often met in bars, quite the contrary from quiet places, with loud stereo and ever-buzzing with people; really just the opposite of what is suggested and what I had intended, thinking about the quality of the recordings (ibid, 238), but a trade-off one always wants to take in order to establish a more natural interview setting. This natural-ness decreases the amount of irritation interviewees by the artificiality of the situation. For instance, it can get irritating when recording devices get laid down on the table, as the recording itself is a social interaction and only allows for an interview to take place (Jenks 2018, 120).

2.2.2. Interviews

As interview dates drew closer, just the form and structure of the interview had to be determined. This must be done in advance, in order to generate data that is comparative to a certain extent. The interviews were all conducted open, semi-structured and with a referentialist focus. They followed a corpus of loosely connected themes and topics that were tailored to each individual or their respective organisation. Referentialist relates to the inner thoughts and authentic reflections of my interview partners (Roulston & Choi 2018, 236) opposed to a fact-based question-answer setting that is sometimes sought in expert interviews. Of course, as I was interviewing people that work and represent institutions as well, this referentialist frame often was two-fold; while these professionals were always keen on stating what the sources of their answers were (they quoted internal researches and studies that were conducted recently), the individual and personal opinions were sought after as well. Making this clear is key to a fruitful interview session with people that occupy two different positions in the field (in this case professional and personal). The interview partners

would often introduce arguments by explicitly stating this was their own opinion and not the perspective of their organisation. Some of the interview partners that are employed in the NGO sector switched between professional and personal stances. This reflected consideration shows manoeuvrability they have gained through professional training and experience of daily political business in their respective organisations.

The interviews were structured in a way that started with an introduction of the interview partners. This is a fine way to break ice and establishing a good working environment for interviews. The transition from the personal background to the current working situation was smooth in most cases. Civil society, *Odupri Se*, the political system and inequalities represented the consequent topics. Whenever an avenue in an interview opened that could lead me to useful data or episodic details, I would have inquired a little; a technique called probing (ibid, 234). If the topic corruption had not yet arisen, and in all the cases it has done so before, I intended to bring it up myself, by asking where they thought the roots of corruption lie. In the end of the interviews stood questions about the relationship of Montenegro with international agents as the European Union, Russia, China, the NATO and future expectations.

I was particularly interested in narrated stories, too, even though my interviews were not full-fledged narrative interviews. Rather, they involved narrative elements that would hopefully provide enough episodic narrations to follow up on in the analysis. Small-scale narratives, the recounting of situations of corruption or similar things in my thesis, should reveal personal experiences and fit in larger narratives (Flick 2018b, 539). Albeit it does not represent a complete narrative analysis, it still caters to the basic goals of this strand of research: to explore different interpretations on human experience (Murray 2018, 272).

While the primary data is supplemented by secondary data, interviews still are the most important method of raw data collection that is used in the research project. The literature suggests that it is sufficient to do interviews to learn about sense-making and about interpretations of people (Roulston & Choi 2018, 243). Another type of data accompanying the interviews are the analysis of some official documents on the accession progress of Montenegro of the EU and media responses about Montenegro regarding the EU accession. The scope of this thesis prevents a profound analysis of these primary sources. While a more extensive multi-method approach would certainly be beneficial, I am confident that the data

I collected through the interviews and the analysis I did with the other primary sources are fully adequate for the research project at hand. One of the prime critique points that speak against using interviews as the main data source is the subjectivity and inaccuracy of people when it comes to detailed event descriptions and the like (ibid, 243). My research is not aiming at establishing facts about events and happenings, but rather views the narratives *about* events and phenomena and the omittances, may they be deliberate or not, as data.

The data I gathered through interviews is close to the life of my interview partners. Letting them speak about topics and asking questions about their views on different things allowed me to gain data that is new, present and produced in cooperation. Some of my participants probably have given interviews before, especially the professional ones, but the personal questions are not part of interview questionnaires normally; so, the data I obtained is *new*. It is present, as the happenings, people and the events we talked are not so much only happening during the interview, but are shaped in a distinct way; past events and people get reinterpreted constantly and thereof new meaning emerges; the data is a *snapshot of the present situation of my interview partners*. And because the interviews were not conducted alone, and because I interacted with the interviewees, the data is a work of *collaboration*. The subjectivity inherent in such interviews owing to the researcher is tackled in the data analysis. These factors make face-to-face interviews stand out against other obtainment strategies, such as written interviews.

2.2.3 Hardware and Software

In textbooks on methods, the antiquated term technology always has the position of a sidekick in the chapters on interviews. For, whenever the technology works, nobody talks about it, but when there is a problem, it can be a disaster: valuable data can either be lost forever or never have been saved at all. Therefore, technical preparations are part of the fieldwork preparation (ibid, 238). For my interviews, my mobile phone was used; I tested it beforehand, took it to interviews fully charged and had a power bank with me just in case a recharge was needed. In the noisy bars I made audio samples and tried to find the quietest table in the room, sometimes involving re-seating of me and my interview partner.

Like the technical setup addressed in the hardware paragraph above, the software used in the research process should also be clarified. Again, in books on methods, the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) normally get little to no attention. The software,

as *MAXQDA* that I worked with for the empirical part of my thesis, helps to order and analyse data. Data analysis always needs to be in line with the research framework and, although the usage of software requires skills on its own, the data analysis becomes more manageable. *MAXQDA* was used as a handy tool to keep order in the jungle of codes and interviews (Gibbs 2014, 279f). On the side of literature, *Citavi* was used to store, save and remember literature that was read during the whole research process.

2.3 Generating Raw Data

As mentioned before, my fieldwork provided insightful narrative elements. Doing a narrative research not only changes the way in which interviews are conducted, they also impact the way in which transcripts are done. When doing a linguistic analysis of stories, one must transcribe every little detail, from small pauses to yawns, at best even gestures that are barely audible in the audio file and can only be seen on video records.

Doing a transcript and thus turning an audio or video file into a workable piece of data like a text document is a reductionist effort (Jenks 2018, 122). After transcribing, features that could be interesting to other scholars are lost and can only be retrieved from the original media files. That is why the act of transcribing is a step in the research process that needs to be thought about as well. The research question and project outline should dictate what is necessary to include and what is not (Hoek 2014, 108). In my case, the research question *How do NGOs in Montenegro and civic activists perceive corruption?* dictated a qualitative collection method, as opinion and insights into feelings are not obtainable by surveys. Perception is a very personal topic and must be captured very carefully, by close listening as is the case in qualitative interviews. Even in written interviews, for example, the writer judges his or her words before writing if they are useful or sought after by the partner, and if the judgement goes towards not useful, the writer will not write them down. But in qualitative interviews, the spontaneous thoughts and remarks can be insightful. Oftentimes my interview partner switched to a meta level and asked if this is useful for me at all. In interviews the researcher can encourage, in written interviews and surveys there is no such possibility.

This sort of transcription is called closed transcription. The main critique point for closed transcription is the shaping of the transcription process on basis of the research agenda, as parts of the interview that are of no use to the researcher doing the transcripts do not necessarily need to be transcribed and are absent in the transcript (Jenks 2018, 123). My

transcripts that are the empirical basis for this thesis comprise all words of both interview partners to repel this critique point.

The transcription process was done a considerable time after the interviews were conducted. The so-called entextualisation, being back from the research site in my *own* living environment, ultimately leads to the generating of documents that lack the original context and a lot of human interaction for the reason to boil it down to a word document, a reductionist endeavour (ibid, 125). For analysis reasons, whenever interesting passages came about, I automatically went back to the original media file in order to dig deeper into the meaning of the interviewee's statements. The human touches in an interview often were strongest while talking about then-recent events. Neither the interviews nor I did have emotional distance from some events that happened just before the actual interview. An example is the smoking ban that was introduced in mid of August, during my fieldwork (URL 6). The situation was new and some things my interview partners or I said sparked surprise or laughter. Several months later, during transcribing, these emotions are absent on paper, but nevertheless offer some insights. One woman told me about the reason for the new law. She was convinced that the ban and the involved high fees are there to pay for the debt of a large-scale highway project that put Montenegro deep in Chinese debt. For me the reasoning behind it was of course the EU accession plans. My bias after all the literature might play a role here. The audio and word file are also rough for making out sarcasm. Some of my informants build their general arguments on sarcasm and irony and, when entextualised, these things get hard to decipher.

2.4 Strategies of Analysis

In the research process, the production of raw data and its conversion into usable resources for the researcher are only the initial steps of preparation before the analysis of the data in the strict sense can begin. Uwe Flick, a scholar of methodology, attributes an enormous significance to the data analysis part. Without proper analysis, all parts of research process to that point are in vain (Flick 2014, 3). An argument I absolutely share, since the major research work happens in this phase and takes a lot of time and energy. My interviews were analysed in two different ways: qualitative content analysis and a trimmed version of narrative analysis. While the first one again involves a reduction by turning the data into codes, the latter stays close to the text and analyses it as it is. For my research project, the usage of both analysis

strategies has two major advantages. Firstly, it upholds the proximity to my interview partners and their view, which is crucial as perceptions are concerned. Secondly, by departing from the text per se and working with codes, the interrelation between the interviews and larger phenomena can be discerned.

One of the aims of analysis of qualitative data can be the identification of differences and commonalities between groups (ibid, 5-6). With my two analytically separated groups in activists and employees of civil society organisations (CSO), I do have comparable material on the notions, conceptions and ideas how these groups make sense of different social phenomena, in my case all things connected to corruption and civil society. This is especially obvious where the role of civil society and especially NGOs in the society are concerned; CSO employees tended to emphasise the role of their sector and argued for its importance. With the activists, the answers were more diverse; lines were drawn within the NGO sector and funding and money in general played a bigger role. For another difference was that CSO employees oftentimes included sources such as surveys to increase the quality of their argument.

2.4.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

The principal strategy for analysis of the raw data is done through qualitative content analysis. It is an analysis strategy that Philipp Mayring, a psychologist, developed and is now one of the most-used strategies in analysing interviews (Flick 2014, 11). For the strategy, the interviews are read and split up into smaller parts. Those parts are then assigned to categories that are taken from the coding frame. Qualitative content analysis offers some flexibility while it is still a systematic approach and it reduces the data, in my case transcripts, to the more abstract categories (Schreier 2014, 170).

The coding frame is the core element of this analysis strategy. The categories used emerge from the research interest and research question. This category is concept-driven and comes from an etic standpoint, as these categories come to a great extent from the pre-fieldwork research; they are theoretical in their quality. Another kind of category are the ones that were not foreseen by the researcher and find their way into the coding frame through the interviewee. In other words, the interview situation reveals important issues that were not heeded in the pre-fieldwork research but appear to be relevant in answering the research question. For this, they are content-driven, originating from the spoken words of the

interviewees in my case. They are emic, contrary to the former kind of categories. The third set of categories in the coding frame are merely an organisational aid to the researcher. They are there strictly to keep an overview over the data (ibid, 173-174).

Those overarching kind of categories in the coding frame can but not have to have subcategories on their own, as is visible in my analysis. The aim is to turn the transcripts into more abstract categories to render them more comparable. Coding is, fundamentally, an attempt to arrange data in a way to find similarities and differences between interviewees and groups of interviewees. The fundamental way of gaining insights is thus a comparison. Comparison itself has a long and disputed history within the study of anthropology. After experiencing a decline in reputation among anthropologists with a cultural relativist paradigm, and the exclaimed incomparability of different cultural and social settings, comparison came back to the anthropological mainstream through a more interactive social science and humanities field in general (Palmberger and Gingrich 2014, 96-97). By converting the raw data into abstractions, the qualitative content analysis finds a balance between the critique and the advantages of comparison as a result-seeking strategy.

For the coding frame, the overarching categories used in this thesis are *corruption*, *civil society including Odupri Se*, *Montenegrin politics* in general, *international relations* and *background of interviewee*. Those categories sometimes overlap but seem to grasp and organise all the research interest in a decent manner. Those categories all have their sub- and sub-subcategories, *corruption* for instance is divided into *anecdotes*, *roots*, *morals*, *informality and kin*, *essential need* and *corruption now*. Corruption in some sort or the other extends through the other categories as well, although that is infused by the research project that my interview partners knew of.

The overarching categories all relate to some part of my research project. While the recruitment already filters people that have either activist or professional background in civil society, or both, the category *civil society* covers their assessment of the civil society sector and the mass protest movement that was going on before my research. Sensitive topics such as financing in the sector varied to some extent between the groups. This category encompasses the protest movement *Odupri Se* and thus automatically overlaps with *Montenegrin politics*, a category where all developments regarding the political life in Montenegro should be captured. This category is a rather large category and covers fields from legal contemplations to history and the public administration and elites in the country.

The *interview background* category is there to get a better grasp of the interview partners. An example here is the educational and professional training. Was it done in part abroad or does the person has a long-standing experience in the sector and therefore some sort of authority in the sector or is the person a newcomer? In the category *international relations*, people told me about the EU accession, Russia's influence and China's investment. Of course, the neighbouring countries played a role here as well, those were often taken as comparative examples on what is good or bad in Montenegro. By turning the original data, possibly traceable back to interviewees, into anonymous categories the researcher ensures not only a careful handling with personal data but also enhances the level of transparency of the research process, as the coding frame is available on demand.

The categories that stand at the end of the research process are up to interpretation and comparison. The outcome of Mayring's qualitative content analysis is, at the end of the day, descriptions of the data. It will show how often people link phenomena to other phenomena but will not serve as a ground for theory building (Schreier 2014, 181). In my research project, I can for instance show how often different people relate corruption to historic events or stretches or tend to explain it via the cultural way. Those insights are critical for corruption studies. The reason for this is that formal, institutional fights against corruption cannot bear fruits unless these explanations are considered. And more importantly, a confrontation with the people's understanding where corruption roots or whether something is treated as corruption is indeed supporting the idea of a non-universal anti-corruption policy that includes the cultural background and does no perpetuates a primacy of a Western norm. This thesis is thus concerned with bringing together different theories or theory strands to make sense of the outcome of the analysis and critique certain strands with empiric evidence.

2.4.2 Episodes and Narrative

Alongside the main analysis tool of qualitative content analysis, I have chosen another angle to better understand corruption as a concept. According to Ivan Rajković, anthropological preoccupation with corruption comes from two main strands that is either a description of moral economy or a narrative axis that is tied to the reproduction of the state (Rajković 2018, 132). My take on narratives and corruption wants to integrate both strands. As stated before, I do not want to attempt a full narrative or discourse analysis, the lack of sufficient language skills alone is enough hurdle to make this impossible. Instead, I want to take in consideration the possible information in episodic narratives about corruption. This attempt should capture

two main aspects, historicity and evaluation of corruption done by individuals and, by embedding this in the geopolitical frame, enabling a kind of traceability of a bigger narrative.

For the first aspect, the approach is to look for possible explanations and origins of corruption to find a sort of folk history of corruption. By doing this, corruption becomes the protagonist in a story about the nation, the state, elites and other players that relate to corruption. In a group interview, two of my interview partners argued about whether the socialist period was bad or not and what it has to do with corruption. They agreed that informal ties were a part of the system beforehand and then linked it to *their specific culture*. This argument between my two interview partners in a way illustrate two common explanations of corruption: the culture and heritage strand and the one that focuses on the socialist system and its specifics. Narratives serve as a way of simplifying complex circumstances to digestible bits that people can relate to in their everyday lives. These narratives emerge in the act of talking with all kind of people, be it close kin or stranger and underline a constructionist quality of history as well (Ochs and Capps 2001, 2). Making complex, even structural phenomena relatable means that people can also make a step in the other direction. Seeing the complex in their most trivial everyday experience. Exactly this point of view can be seen in the anecdotes told by people, by telling mundane stories and rooting bigger concepts in it. Ultimately, the personal stories and narratives are shaped and, by implication, shape the societal, grand narratives (Murray 2018, 265).

The second aspect, the geopolitical frame, is connected to this. As discourse analysis is concerned with hegemony and power relations, not only people are at the same time affected by and producer of narratives that shape their relationship with others, so are (nation) states. The *Balkans* as a politically interesting region was constructed in the 19th century and this grand narrative comprises certain elements that are characterised by a sturdiness against the sands of time, as Todorova (2009) showed in her work. This narrative is used by inter- and supranational organisations very well when it comes to demarcations and construction of insiders and outsiders. This second aspect seeks to fortify the bridge between disciplines anthropology and political science.

2.5. Role of the Researcher & Ethics

In my research setting, with the limited time frame I had and the collection method being only interviews, the role of the researcher is not that critical as it is when the methods comprise

participant-observation, as my the only collection frame in the narrow sense happened during interviews, where the roles were obviously distributed (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 14). Of most importance, and that come from both the literature and the research plan, awareness of power relations in the field must be taken into account. It is me, a young scholar from Austria, a quite rich state and member of the European Union, travelling to a country that is listed as only partly free with a score of 62 on the Freedom House index 2019; Austria is listed as free with a score of 93 (URL 7). Montenegro is in the process of accession to the EU as well, turning it into a petitioner vis a vis the member states, inter alia Austria, establishing a power hierarchy. I was identified as a foreigner coming from a country that is considered to have stronger institutions and a well-functioning democracy. In conversations, people oftentimes informed me that certain phenomena in Montenegro could never happen in my country of origin. This geopolitical context shaped to some extent of the openness of the interviewees and the depth and range of information people were willing to provide (Esin 2014, 209). My individual positioning was that of a sympathiser of the civil society sector that is fighting for civil and human rights and of a critic of unjust systems. These two factors, the exterior and the interior, shaped how I was perceived in the field and from my interviewees.

Ethics must be considered carefully in a country that is only listed as partly free, as it may be a matter of personal safety and well-being of people I interacted with. For this reason, the transcripts and media files themselves are not included in any way in the thesis. They will not be given to anyone, except for academic inquiry concerning the authenticity of the research. The parts of the interviews that will be used, be it in the form of narratives or in codes, will lack traceability, as personal identifiers such as names, positions et cetera will be removed, a step that Esin and her colleagues suggest in their work with narrative analysis (ibid, 210).

3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

As a foundation of this thesis, the following pages will be giving an overview about historical, political, social and economic developments in Montenegro; those factors have influenced and still influence the realities, life worlds and beliefs and therefore, the behaviour of the people (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 22). This overview will follow a linear temporal axis. I will start with exploring a few historical developments, which will be important to understanding the analysis provided in the chapters thereafter. The historical engagement will start in the early 19th century, the reasons for this choice will be explained below. As the chapter heads closer to the present day on our temporal axis, the extensiveness of the elaborations will increase. Before the chapter sets foot in the 21st century, kingdoms, socialist federations, extremely violent break-ups and loose state unions will be regarded. At this point, Milo Đukanović, one of the key political players since the late 1980s, has already started to build his power base.

After what were mostly historical literature sources, in the latter part of the context I will include anthropological, political science and economic science sources. Working and doing science in an anthropological way here means to critically examine studies and look for aspects that may contribute to the research interest at hand. The short notes on interdisciplinarity given in the previous chapter should be kept in mind for this chapter. Using other disciplines for one's own sake is double-edged in a way and especially in context chapters a thorough engagement has to be an utmost concern.

To provide a tangible example, the matter of clan-based organisation is explained roughly. For many of my interview partners, the reason for their perception of the level of corruption in Montenegro has got its roots in the clan-based organisation. This clan-based organisation falls into the realm of historians, as the existence of this form of social organisation comes to an end in the early 19th century (Calic 2019a, 269-270). While history is engaged with the actual existence of the phenomenon, my anthropological approach rather speaks to people's current conception of such phenomena. In the making of such conceptions and thus shaping the perception of a connected phenomenon like corruption, knowledge of the present state of research on the topic is vital. This is especially true as my data derives from imaginations and conceptions of the concept. In the process, I must differentiate between accepted facts and the added parts in the narrations.

The overview that follows focuses on three aspects: *social organisation*, the *political system* with its *power dynamics* and the *embeddedness* in a regional and global setting. The social organisation is profound and overlaps with the political system in most areas. It is for analytical purposes that they are split apart; in reality, they are not distinguishable and are flowing into each other. The political system and main actors throughout history have exercised power over people to a greater or lesser degree, and the power that actors inherit within states is not easy to pin down at all times. The situation becomes even more complex when the embeddedness in regional power structures and international geopolitical ambitions are taken into consideration. This chapter will serve as an orientation for the thesis to reference back and intends to give as much overview as needed.

3.1. Anthropology and History

One of the key characteristics of anthropology is its need to have socio-political and historical frames to contextualise human behaviour (LeCompte and Schensul 2010, 12). How much engagement is necessary is owed to the overarching research focus. In this thesis, and this comes from the primary data I have gathered, it needs to cover certain epochs and topics, since every anthropological inquiry should spring from the understanding of people. The epochs and topics are not chosen out of sheer arbitrariness but can be used for a first reflection of the data gathered. Whatever the topic, the interview partner in my research setup chose the epoch that made the greatest sense to themselves. A choice of period not foreseen can even surprise or startle researcher, much like Jakubowska describes in her work on the Polish gentry (Jakubowska 2013, 61). The time periods and topics covered in this thesis were chosen after the interviews were done and transcribed. Of course, the reading and engagement with history did not just start then; a constant process of reading accompanied the fieldwork throughout.

To understand and trace back certain discourses about corruption and its affiliated mechanisms, it is important to acquire a knowledgeable base of the scientific understanding of History. With that base I can try to grasp the thought process of my interview partners and, very cautiously, to even try to find continuity in social organisational structures. The histories people tell me in the form of narratives are entrenched in personal experience and observation. Hand in hand with their historical knowledge, this serves to make sense about

society, the past and their own role. By attributing my interview partners the power of generating their own version of events is to attribute them agency (Herzfeld 2016, 51).

To follow up on this, it is essential to see the tangibility and usage of those histories in the narratives of my interview partners. They use the abstract matter of historical may-have-beens and their oral dissemination to transform them into attitudes and concrete course of actions. The discursive power of embarrassment that is tied to cultural intimacy springs among other things from these individual's histories. They feel embarrassed as part of a group where important aspects of their identity derive from, in this case as a nation, for things they know that are not working perfectly and might link them to happenings in the past for reasons of comprehension and as a coping strategy. The individual narrative derives from personal experience, including History taught in schools. It also importantly draws on a collective narrative (Murray 2018, 265). There is a number of collective identities that offer a frame for embedding the individual story, the one that stands out in my research is the nation. Since the 19th century the concept of nation offers belonging by legitimising a group through ancient connection (Anderson 1983, 5).

A point of contention in the implementation of History in social sciences is often the *longue durée*. This describes something that is of very long-lasting effect. Segert (2015, 85-86) takes up the example of historian Longworth who locates the establishment of an Eastern Europe region that is distinct from the more western part, especially as an economically inferior region, in the fourth century CE. Segert condemns this analysis by critiquing the connection as a destiny, lacking an explanation of change. To Segert's argument, this thesis adds that, although certain features can endure the sands of time, they get re-negotiated constantly and must adapt; social organisation tends to transform itself steadily and takes up similar, but different forms with every new generation.

3.2. The Idea of a Clan System

One of the most prominent ideas my interview partners used in their stories was the one of the clan-based social organisation. In the 19th century, they argued, the roots of the current state of corruption can be found. This explains the perceivably bad situation and additionally fosters a national belonging. The comparison could spring from the similarity of the power relations that are in place in the two different times, the tribal structure on the one hand and the perceived elitist rule of the DPS on the other hand.

The tribal structure was patrilineal and divided into different local entities. More families would make up a *bratstvo* (clan) and more *bratstva* would compose a *pleme* (tribe). This system worked as a way of self-organisation during Ottoman rule and its lack of centralised authority. The highest level of organisation was the *skupština*, a tribal assembly that elected *vladike* (bishops) from the families of the tribes. The Orthodox belief was woven into the social organisation through this (Morrison 2009a, 18-19). Following Durkheim, Sundhaussen (2011b, 91-92) sees most of the communities of Southeastern Europe, and the Montenegrin as well, as examples of segmentary society, where the division of labour is low, and people tend to know each other. While at the start of the 19th century the *zadruga*, a traditional extended rural family model was in place to some extent in Montenegro, the massive social change that the 19th century brought about led to the vanishing of this form of extended family by 1850 and gave way for the primacy of the nuclear family (Calic 2019a, 269-270). One of the drivers of this social change was the establishment of modern institutions in Montenegro, which happened after and through the unification of the clans by the Petrović dynasty, and made Montenegro a *de facto* independent, yet not recognized state in form of a prince-bishopric by 1830 (ibid, 252).

The current rule of the DPS in Montenegro is sometimes portrayed as absolutistic, complete and insurmountable by my interview partners (T9, 127). Their systemic rule often leads my interview partners to describe them as an elite that is very well equipped financially and institutionally to stay in power. Salverda and Abbink define elites as *a social group within the hierarchy that claims and/or is accorded power (…) and aims to preserve and entrench its status* (Salverda and Abbink 2013, 5). The systems of political hierarchy based on a patrilineal clan-based system and the modern party-based organisation in the hands of DPS share some similarities. Firstly, they are inaccessible for outsiders. One must be in the tribal system or in the party to get into certain positions within the hierarchy. Secondly, the head of organisation is vested with centralised power. For my interview partners, these similarities are seemingly more striking than all the drastic changes that happened ever since the clan-based system was a reality. It becomes clear that a continuity is seen in the implementation of power. The realisation of the unification of clans by the Petrović dynasty is just another step towards the institutionalisation of power. Even though the establishment of institutions pushed back the realm of the clan-based organisation, the virtue of coming from this realm bestows a tribal character upon the new monarchy.

This conception of the similarities between these different times are owed to grave reductions. While the nation-state was in the process of establishing after 1830, the principle of rule was a monarchic one. From this respect, the modern democratic rule based on free elections is a categorically different one. Despite this disparity, the narratives of my interview partners see these epochs as a continuation. This happens through the narrative labour of my interviewees. By linking the past to the present, they try to make sense of the present. Whether or not that picture of the past is scientifically grounded or not does not matter that much. What does matter is the possibility to find meaningful explanations for the present. This happens through projection of the present onto the past. Because it constitutes a gaze into the past from the present, discursive elements, such as moral assessments and prejudices are part of that projection. Montenegro is seen as parts of the *Balkan*, which was constructed as a distinctive region in the 19th century to propel colonial ambitions of Western European powers by establishing a picture of insiders and outsiders of the morally superior West (Todorova 2009, 3); in the *Balkanism* discourse, Montenegro was put outside the borders of the *imagined civilized world*. The repercussions of this exclusion are one of the findings of this thesis. It is those repercussions, I argue, that allows the European Union to present itself as a morally impeccable entity vis-à-vis the petitioner for acceptance, Montenegro.

The 19th century was marked by a drastic change in social organisation. Not only was the new entity of belonging in form of the nation put more and more forward by an elite circle that derived its legitimation through a religious dynastical principle, the power over the just-establishing institutions went to their grip as well. People felt more direct power than in the Ottoman days from their respective rulers. The period from the end of Ottoman rule to the integration into the First Yugoslavia and especially the clan system for many of my interview partners laid the foundation of the corruption in place in Montenegro today. By pointing out the patriarchal rule and the alleged survived mindset a lot of corruption in the eyes of my research partners could be traced back to that time. Pitting the new nation of Montenegro against a corrupt Ottoman-influenced and backward clan-system in a way vindicates current Montenegro by putting the lion's share of the blame towards an external coloniser and leaves some embarrassment for the internal system. In the stories and little history lessons I heard in the interviews, the embeddedness in a larger Eurasian power structure was thus acknowledged.

The whole process of modernisation happened not in an isolated space, but in a Europe where the *Enlightenment* dictated the course of the 19th century, including massive population growth, expansion of market economy, establishments of national movements and the *Eastern Question* (Calic 2019b, 14). This question was a response to the signs of decay of the Ottoman Empire and the opportunity for European powers to start engaging more aggressively in the geopolitical region of Southeastern Europe (Calic 2019a, 197). The *Eastern Question* discourse that came about at that point will be at the heart of analysis later, as due to geopolitical ambitions European powers turned its eyes towards the Balkan peninsula and established, among other things, a modern-backwards dichotomy that still is a source of prejudices about the Balkan and Southeast Europe.

3.3. Modernising the State

Montenegro in the 19th century underwent the process of modernisation. Eisenstadt put forward the idea of multiple modernities. While the key change is the change of notion of the individual in a society, the context determines the modernity in question and shapes the process to be a unique one (Eisenstadt 2000, 4f). Montenegro's context was the prince-bishopric under Ottoman rule. The modernisation entailed a variety of institutions to exert power over individuals and to bind them. Before this (nation)-state, the village or the extended family was the epicentre of social life. The *zadruga*, a form of extended family found in some parts of Montenegro and the village community lost its importance rapidly. The social institution of the village became a mere point of transmission of state power and was degraded to just a typology of settlement (Sundhaussen 2011b, 95).

This transformation from a small-scale social order to a more complex one through a top-down-process that was portrayed as being without alternative options, can be seen as one of the biggest and most profound transformations in the Southeast European societies, and indeed, in the whole of Europe in the last centuries. The factors and effects of this change are multitude. In their core, they changed the conception of community itself (Sundhaussen 2011a, 345ff). While in other countries across Europe national movements started to stand their ground for sovereignty of their respective nations, in Montenegro the process was convoluted. During the *Eastern* Crisis (1875-78), Montenegro together with Serbia declared war on the Ottoman Empire. In the aftermath, Montenegro was given the status of an independent state in the subsequent Congress of Berlin in 1878 and expanded its territory

massively (Morrison 2009a, 28). After this war, territorial tensions between Montenegro and Serbia rose and further intensified due to the Serbian nationalist movement that was bound to unify Serbia with Montenegro. A split in the society erupted that divided people in those who were rooted in their villages and people that looked towards Belgrade and were aware and favourable of democratic reforms in Serbia. This polarisation happened in a Montenegro where a closed ruling elite under the quite despotic ruler Nikola I Petrović-Njegoš controlled the political landscape in the country (ibid, 32). For Bogdan, one of my interview partners, Nikola I is the first ruler that gathers the elites of the country behind him to come to power. While he sees the unification of clans as an achievement, the despotic rule that Nikola I exerted, for Bogdan gives him a likeness to Đukanović (T8, 5).

What happened in Montenegro in the 19th century follows some of the established ways of modernity. Many forces that interacted with each other gave way to and were influenced by modernity. Industrialisation, cultural liberalisation and the formation of nation-state were among the key drivers of modernisation (Calic 2019a, 313). The most important aspect for this chapter is the re-organisation of the social and political organisation, with both the establishment of a quasi-national state and thus a social organisation that is contesting the primacy of the family as a reference point for the individual. This re-organisation also entailed another concept of human agency; the notion that human actions inherit formative potential for societies developed in course of the modernities (Eisenstadt 2000, 4f). Some historians tend to call this process of transition from Ottoman rule to a post-Ottoman state a *return to Europe*, as the Balkan peninsula was more connected and dependent to European forces than in the period where Constantinople was the capital (Sundhaussen 2011a, 345). Eisenstadt showed in his work quite plausibly that researchers should not think of modernity as a uniquely European political project and view that serves as a blueprint all other regions should follow. Instead he calls for attention for the constructivist nature of this processes and the steady re-constitution of society through different cultural and political programmes, thus attributing non-Western regions their own, sovereign modernities.

This period above was of lesser importance for my interview partners. Still, the essence of this period is still exerting influence over Montenegrin politics today, especially in the fields of nationalism and religion. Firstly, the national discourse and how to see it in relation to Serbia led to the independence of the current state of Montenegro and provides for conflicts over religious affiliation of the national church such a in late 2019 (URL 8). And secondly, the

discussion about modernity with its intrinsic normative potential, this thesis argues, stipulated the relationship between current Montenegro and the European Union from the start.

3.4. Yugoslavia and the Wars

The wars at the end of the so-called long 19th century, and especially the Balkan Wars, serve as a reference point for discourses about the region; they represent, among other things, a foothold to construct a European *Other*. This constructed *Other*-ness of the whole peninsula that is subsumed under the name *Balkans* was pointed out in a ground-breaking work *Imagining the Balkans* (2009) of Maria Todorova in the late 1990s. She showed how the popular literature painted a picture of the region that is very essentialist and a picture that is still used in the discourse about the region. Diana Mishkova, in her more recent work *Beyond Balkanism* (2019) elaborated on the contribution of academic writings for the establishing and fostering of this essentialising discourse. In her train of thought the importance is laid on the co-authorship and thus responsibility and subjectivity of regional elites and especially academics in the creation of the historical region and their usage of the concepts to propel their self-serving goal (Mishkova 2019, 7). The empirical findings presented in a later chapter can be seen as a possible evidence of the passed-on essentialist co-authorship of the academic sphere. My academically trained interview partners, as reflexive as they were about essentialist properties, often relapsed back into these patterns to re-tell and explain anecdotes and to render it comprehensive.

After the First World War, the occupation of the Middle powers of Montenegro ended. Montenegro unified with Serbia and was quickly subsumed into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Montenegrin Orthodox Church was incorporated into the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1919; a proposed undoing of this incorporation in 2019 caused a major controversy that is at the time of writing still going on. The strong status of the church to this day is a major source of concern to all the quite young interview partners I talked to. The kingdom became a royal dictatorship in the 1929 and changed its name to Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Portmann 2011, 559-560). The dynastic and despotic rule of that time again was put in a line with Nikola I and the current elite once again by (T8, 5). Yugoslavia entered the Second World War on side of Germany when it signed the Tripartite Pact in 1941. After the general public showed opposition to the pact, the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia, established the fascist Ustaša state on most of its territory (Morrison 2009a, 50f) and Montenegro fell in

the sphere of Mussolini's fascist Italy (Calic 2019b, 125). From 1941 onwards, a civil war in the Yugoslav countries started, where the partisans under their leader Tito came out on top. The slogan B*ratstvo i Jedinstvo* (Brotherhood and Unity) became the battle cry and the slogan of the later-on Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with Tito as the political leader (ibid, 138-139).

Already during the war, the communists established People's Committees in the liberated areas, expropriated landholdings and possessions and gave land to the peasantry. A move that sought to bring about a system change, gaining them support bottom-up and representing a major change in the social fabric that was not violent and war-driven in nature (ibid, 153). This social change towards a socialist system constitutes a deep alteration and is a significant turning point and formative for the political system for contemporary Montenegro. The end of this civil war in Montenegro came in late 1944, the end in the whole of Yugoslavia followed in May 1945, and the new socialist regime proudly presented itself as its liberator. Although they received considerable support from the Allies (Brunnbauer 2011b, 604), Yugoslavia can be considered as the only country in Europe that liberated itself in the Second World War (Calic 2019b, 159-160). The relevance of the period of the Second World War for my interview partners is minimal. As it was not on my topics to discuss with them, it did not come up on its own. For the reason of understanding nationalist mechanism in Montenegro in the 90s, however, the war period is important.

3.5. Socialist Yugoslavia

Joel Halpern, US-American scholar, was pioneering anthropological fieldwork in the socialist sphere of Yugoslavia. He did fieldwork on organisation of the family, kinship relations and the *zadruga* and published a book in 1958 (Halpern 2003 & 1958). The *zadruga* was in demise already a hundred years earlier with the dawning of the modern state (Calic 2019a, 269-270). The state in form of the Socialist Yugoslavia grew more encompassing and the end of the Second World War (Calic 2019b, 160-161). An interim government was set up between Tito and the exiled monarchic government. The latter force lost all the little power it had in the elections in November 1945 (Brunnbauer 2011b, 605). Those elections were neither fair nor free, the non-communist parties were systematically destroyed afterwards, and a one-party system was eventually imposed in 1947 (Calic 2019b, 164). Montenegro was granted the status of an equal republic within the federative structure of the Federal People's Republic of

Yugoslavia. Montenegrins were also one of the constitutive nations of the federation (ibid, 168).

People that fought along the partisans in the war were put into all kind of positions within the state apparatus. The bureaucratic apparatus, in high, middle and low level was staffed with veterans of the liberation struggle. As the education system and other state institutions expanded immensely, a large portion of the population was employed by the newly formed state within no time. The advantage of being a party member cannot be overstated, as this affiliation was the only way into the public job market. This condition was thought of many of my interview partners as a remnant of that time. As we will see later, the party in power today, the DPS, is the successor of the same party that took the power after the war ended in 1945. If the main goal for a party is to stay in power, providing people with jobs in the large public sector serves as a perfect driver for people to support the party. The partisans, the people that actually fought battles for the new state, of course got treated even better than just regular party members. In the higher positions of the new institutions, the veterans of war, as a symbol for the leitmotiv of Yugoslavia, *Bratsvo i Jedinstvo*, took on the role of a new elite.

Those power structures deemed to be successful during the war, although the little education and absence of proper training of this new mass of bureaucrats foreshadowed the deficiencies of the state apparatus of Yugoslavia to come (Calic 2019b, 165). This mass instalment of loyal personnel is an example of an exchange of elite after a regime change, in the Montenegrin case from the fascist Italian puppet state to a socialist republic. Montenegrin people were overrepresented in the Yugoslav army during the war and leading political positions and administrative bodies within the federation were consequently allocated disproportionally to Montenegrins after the war (Morrison 2018a, 20). This characteristic prevailed, as the numbers show. While Montenegro made up five per cent of the population and only two per cent of the gross domestic product of the Yugoslav state after the federalisation in 1974, it held one-eighth of the political power of the union (Morrison 2009a, 76).

The post-war years saw an economic boom in Yugoslavia, as in many other countries throughout Europe. Productivity increased through technological progress and together with relocation of resources from the agrarian to the industrial sector provided for a complete change in the labour market in Yugoslavia and a change in the social composite of people (Calic 2019b, 184). The share of people employed in the industrial sector rose steadily through the

years, as did the tertiary sector (Brunnbauer 2011c, 669). Especially the public administration of Yugoslavia grew throughout its existence, driven also by the decentralisation. The massive bureaucratic structure will at the same time hamper the development and provide jobs for masses of people later.

In the increasingly prosperous society that had opened its education system, people became more educated, another pillar of the socialist development. The education was holistic in the sense that all parts of social life served as transmitter of socialist values and the spread of *cultivated* life among the citizens. The Yugoslav socialism emphasised humanism and core Enlightenment values as well, such as social security and a health (Calic 2019b, 173). This kind of socialist modernisation took an interesting rationale from other European modernities of the 19th century, namely the backward-civilised dichotomy. While the communist countries always had an agrarian-industrial dichotomy or rather evolutionary pattern to work with, this *cultivation* in Yugoslavia was directly targeted against a traditional-patriarchal lifestyle.

The economic system seemed to be making progress in the 50s, but the progress was not so much reliant on the power of the economy, but on foreign powers and their investment. It is true that the shift towards industrial production brought advantages for a vast amount of people, as did the creation of jobs in the bureaucratic structure. The development of the former was spurred by investment of the US and European countries that hoped to convince Tito's Yugoslavia of the capitalist system after his fallout with Stalin. The latter was really a blown-up apparatus that was in its core very ineffective. Both developments are intertwined as the economic upswing directly induced the extension of the bureaucratisation, which, as mentioned before, lead to mismanagement and bad investment due to a largely unskilled staff. With the extension of the public sector came a surge of corruption as well (Calic 2019b, 184). The downsides of this system were not visible until well in the 1970s. A shortage of jobs within Yugoslavia was compensated by migrant worker contracts with the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria and other Western European countries. Planned as a temporary worker's movement, a lot of workers stayed in their respective *host countries* and developed to a diaspora that makes up an important political factor in the countries of origin today, as we shall see later (Brunnbauer 2011b, 618).

The degree of decentralisation of the federation was raised with every new constitution from 1953 to 1974. The name change from Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia to Socialist

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) was done in the constitution of 1963 for example and wanted to distance itself from the Soviet example. The growing decentralisation was not functional however and this came to light unpleasantly after Tito's death in the 1980s (ibid, 619). Within the structure of Yugoslavia, Montenegro and the other southern republics, had a less developed economy and were receiver of federal funds (Morrison 2009a, 74). The public sector grew with the decentralisation, an example is the shift of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from a unified structure to a coalition of republican parties after 1974, leading to quasi-independent republican parties and a whole party machinery on the republic level behind them (ibid, 73). The size of the bureaucracy of the federation compared to other countries of the same size was eight-fold, the goal of decentralisation, a democratisation, failed:

> In the end, the idea proved illusory that the negotiated economy, self-management, and the frequent rotation of delegates could actually breathe more democratic life into the one-party state. The Yugoslav system represented merely *a higher form of institutionalized ineffectiveness that placed political opportunism ahead of economic rationality*, cancelled the rules of a market economy and entrepreneurial professionalism, bloated the size of the bureaucracy, and invited irresponsibility, wastefulness, and abuse of office. (Calic 2019a, 244)

The state in form of the public sector and the party, twins from the start, were indistinguishable by the 1970s. Oligarchic power structures were in place and a small circle of people was in charge. These oligarchs represented the elite that was put into office after the war and the people they handpicked to follow them. To understand this party elite and their power, understanding their reproduction is key. Radovan Đukanović was an influential member of the Montenegrin branch of the Communist Party in the socialist times. Through his influence, his son Milo can be seen as his political protégé (Morrison 2009b, 28). The inheritance of political power functioned in a system that was not merit-based. Equipped with this power by his father, young Milo rose the ranks of youth organisations quickly and was one of the spearheads of the takeover of Milosević (ibid, 29). The argument of importance of family, even within nation-states will later be discussed and Milo's political coming of age is an advocate for it.

To be clear, there were official institutional processes in place at the time. The problem is, and this is another parallel of the portrayal of Montenegrin current politics of my interview

partners, the rules look wonderful and all-encompassing on paper, but the execution and monitoring is the difficult part. The elite circle, and this I argue, is true for now and then, can use their resources to get around the rules via informal ways and have their will. This is tragic at any time, in Socialist Yugoslavia that was above all a death sentence to structural reforms, as this would have meant restricting power for themselves (Calic 2019b, 257). While the elite after the war was clearly made of war veterans and the like, a new elite rose through the ranks that had no connection with the partisan era. Another key difference between these elites are also the differences in class; the percentage of white-collar workers within the party was at about 40 per cent in 1966, a figure that was just 10 per cent after the war. The 20 years after the war, through the educational reforms, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia transformed into a middle-class party (ibid, 207).

Internationally, Yugoslavia founded and took leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961 (Brunnbauer 2011b, 621). Interestingly, it assumed its leader-role among the wide variety of African and Asian states because of its history with colonial struggle in both, Habsburg and Ottoman Empire, and the liberation struggle in the Second World War. The international reputation of Yugoslavia and Tito soared and strengthened also the internal cohesion. An example is the feeling of greater security of Muslims within Yugoslavia, as the NAM had many members in the Islamic world (Calic 2019b, 187-188). Because the NAM was put together by countries that were not part of the so-called First World, it comes with a bitter taste that even then a European country took the leadership.

The envisaged economic model did not materialise, and Yugoslavia fell into a deep crisis in the late 70s, when the large global economic players started to outsource industrial production and focused on the third sector. The reality of a post-industrial Europe stroke Yugoslavia hard, as it also shook its foundations: the industrial progress was a pillar of the state (ibid, 248). The economy slipped into crisis in the 70s, the only saving grace for the bare survival of the Yugoslav economy were foreign investment and loans; the international economic crisis of the 1970s put an end to this foreign support (Brunnbauer 2011c, 678). The dire situation in the economy can also be seen on the labour market, which shows a steady growth of the unemployment rate; even though many people went to work abroad as guest workers, the percentage rose from 5,5 per cent in 1960 to 17 per cent in 1988 (Brunnbauer 2011b, 618). The economic pressure not only led the government to be more repressive, it also enabled a comeback of anti-modern sentiments and nationalism, particularly after Tito's death in 1980,

whose cult of personality served as a centripetal force within the federation. In the 1980s, all foundational dogmas of Yugoslavia were deconstructed by a fierce group of nationalist players (Calic 2019b, 281-282).

People were aware of the coinciding importance of the public sector and its disproportional size. Before the economic crisis of the 1970s brought about a new harshness of censorship, renowned philosophers were allowed critique the system:

> By reflecting on 'alienation', 'emancipation', and 'humanity', the members of the Praxis group bluntly exposed that *the system of self-management had not enabled more self-determination at all but had only produced a camouflaged form of hierarchical and bureaucratic power structures, an oligarchy of party functionaries, and thus another type of alienation.* (Calic 2019b, 219)

The Yugoslav public picked up a similar stance, if not as sophisticated. The public sector that was extremely big compared to other similar-sized countries was the largest and most important employer in the federation and people affiliated to the party were privileged in the selection processes for the jobs. Keeping in mind the large percentage of people that were unemployed or even driven out of the country to work abroad, access to the public sector was a significant resource. To connect this point with the empirical data I will include here a statement of Emina, one of my interview partners, who shares the picture of a refuge that provides favours, admittances, and employment, she uses the umbrella term corruption for all the small, informal mechanisms:

> It starts from cheating in school to get better grades, giving gifts to professors and doing a favour for easier education of your child, getting admitted at uni, get place in dorm etc- In the institution as well, you really have to know someone to get things done, get employment either by party or being good with someone. It is now more question of mentality of people here. You are crazy if you don't use corruption where you can. (T10, 5)

Questions of mentality and the such will be discussed in more detail in the empirical findings part; for my thesis at this point this quote goes to show the significance of the public sector, and access, through all means possible, to it. The similarity of the discussion about public sector in the late Yugoslavia and in the current system is striking.

The increasing demand in specialised jobs loosened the grip of the party on the public jobs just a little bit to the extent that low and middle management and administration levels could be accessed by people outside the communist party (Calic 2019b, 207). The rising unemployment, the dire overall economic situation and Tito's death gave way to struggle for power in the federation where nationalism became one of the driving forces of disintegration. Milosević became the Serbian party leader in 1986 and started taking over the power within the party from 1987 on what is now called the anti-bureaucratic revolution. He framed himself as a defender of Serbs and gained strong support. Milosević replaced the party officials in other republics and autonomous parts with people loyal to him (Sundhaussen 2014, 256f). The young communist Milo Đukanović was one of his three men in Montenegro. The importance of the ineffectiveness of the *old* system that lost contact with the people and the need to replace it with Milosević' new, allegedly *close-to-the-people* system is visible already in the name of this coup. Albeit nationalism was the decisive force within Milosević' rise to power, he used the concept of a non-functioning public sector skilfully as the intrinsic goal of his takeover; „*Down with the Bureaucrats*!" read the banners of demonstrators in favour of Milosević at his rallies (Calic 2019b, 277; Ther 2016, 57-58). The main aim of the anti-bureaucratic revolution was a re-centralisation of power that was over time decentralised within the federation (Morrison 2018a, 38)

3.6. The Late Yugoslavia and the New Elite

Montenegro was the first republic to have Milosević install a group of young and loyal people at the top of the party. This new elite was led by three men who enjoyed the patronage of Milosević: Svetozar Marović, Momir Bulatović and Milo Đukanović. The change in elites did not happen, as after the Second World War, with people from outside, but the elite was bred within the Montenegrin League of Communists and was in line with the new leader in Belgrade, Slobodan Milosević (Morrison 2009a, 85-86). In 1990, the first multi-party elections were held in Yugoslavia. In Montenegro, the communists gained 83 out of 125 seats, a victory that made Bulatović the president. The newly elected communists wanted to distance themselves from the bureaucrats of the past and changed their name from Montenegrin League of Communists to Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), its current name. In other parts of Yugoslavia, the communists were not successful, and this is also due to the fact that the identification with the Yugoslav state varied to heavily. While it was very high in Montenegro

(80%) and Serbia (84%), it enjoyed less support in Albania (49%) and the northern republics (Slovenia 26%, Croatia 48%) (Calic 2019b, 287).

After Milosević escalated the situation in 1991 by refusing to step down as president according to the rotation principle, the Yugoslav Wars started (ibid, 290) with a war with Slovenia followed by a war with Croatia. The Montenegrin part of the Yugoslav army took part in the campaign against Dubrovnik in the Croatian war and coined and propagated it as a defensive war. The war against Croatia drove a wedge into the Montenegrin assembly and split it up into camps that were either against or in favour of the war (Morrison 2009a: 96f). The international community, and especially Italy, that shared the Adriatic Sea with Croatia and Montenegro, wanted to influence the situation. Italy positioned itself as Montenegro's way to Europe, as an option away from Belgrade (ibid, 99).

With Croatia and Slovenia broken away from the federation, Montenegro and Serbia established the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, leaving the socialism out of the name and Bosnia out of the equation. For this purpose, a referendum was held in 1992, a referendum of undemocratic character according to the opposition, as individuals were put under pressure and public debate and opposition activities were disrupted and hampered severely (ibid, 103). The DPS found itself in a situation where it occupied a monopoly over the power structure in Montenegro, being in control of both media and secret police, negating a serious opposition to form. This monopoly encompassed the public sector jobs as well, another resource that enabled them to control a major share of the job market. This is especially important as the war in Bosnia led the international community to punish Montenegro as part of the federation with blockades and bombardments. The currency, the Yugoslav dinar, became practically worthless in a hyperinflation during the 1990s (Džankić 2018, 212); at its peak the inflation reached 313 million per cent monthly in January 1994 and it lasted for two years (Sundhaussen 2014, 463).

The economic situation deteriorated from a bad situation in Montenegro in the 1980s; already in 1988 Montenegro was indebted and roughly 20 % of its inhabitants lived below a poverty line that allowed them to receive social benefits. The late socialist economy and the sudden end of industrial production took its toll in the largest employer in Montenegro, the Boris Kidrić iron works in Nikšić. It exemplifies the mismanagement of much of the public sector for the sake of employment; without the state support, the unimaginable economic inefficiency

was just too much, as all the raw material of the iron work had to be imported from elsewhere (Morrison 2009a, 77-78).

In the economic crisis-struck Montenegro, the informal economy played an important part. Studies suggest that it nearly made up 40 % of the GDP at some points in the 1990s. For Petrović (2018, 209) the crisis led to a re-stratification that increased the inequality between people on the top and on the bottom end of the society. The elite within the DPS were concentrating on their individual economic and business interests rather than the crisis-shaken state economy (Morrison 2009a, 89-90). All of my interview partners consider this period as the gist of the matter of today's corruption problem.

The economic transformation from socialist market economy to a neoliberal market economy did its fair share in spurring the inequality. The political elite stayed in power throughout this system change and through privatisations and a huge conversion from public to private capital was able to strengthen their position within the state even more, as they would now not only make up the political, but also the economic elite (Petrović 2018, 211-212f). Ther (2016, 82) points out that all people concerned with the changes in systems in Eastern Europe seemed to be without alternatives in the early 1990s, after the Soviet bloc could not gradually change into something else and dispersed, the *Yugoslav Third Way* lead into violence and disintegration and a Western European model of welfare state was simply too expensive for the new states. The change from a socialist system where the whole social framework is under control of the regime to a capitalist system where the economic and the political subsystem, in theory, should be separated, was blocked in Montenegro in a way that the political elites could suit the transformation to their benefit (Lazić 2018b, 224).

3.7. Elite Battles over Allegiances

The period of after the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia until the independence of Montenegro to my interview partners was one of important, if not most decisive period to understand the current situation. While pointing towards earlier period for the establishment of inequality, corruption and the elite, the 1990s are the central starting point for the disproportion of the system.

The situation in Montenegro was harsh during the 1990s and the ruling DPS held its grip on power tight. In 1997 a division within the DPS erupted, the divisional line was drawn this time

along the stance towards Milosević. The then-president of Montenegro, Bulatović, was trying to stay with Milosević, and Đukanović and other important politicians were trying to distance themselves from the Serbian president. They dismissed Bulatović as chairman of the party in early 1997 and he lost in the presidential elections against Đukanović later that year (Morrison 2018b, 157). By this time, the regime was not centred around the person Đukanović but his DPS, something that would gradually change over the years (Vuković 2011, 86).

Bulatović formed a pro-Milosević party and tried to win the parliamentary elections in 1998 against his former party (Sundhaussen 2014, 473). In the election campaign the Bulatović bloc tried to resurrect tribal loyalties, a political move that indicates to some degree an expectation on the side of the campaigners that the concept of tribal belonging is still in people's heads (Morrison 2009a, 175). The political axis that was dominating the whole political life in Montenegro from the Milo-Momo (Đukanović-Bulatović) confrontation onwards was *independentism-integralism*; this is nothing new to Montenegro, which has seen a similar split in the 1920s already (Morrison 2009a, 143). As in earlier periods, this divisional line can also be seen on a map, as the North is leaning towards Serbia, both in geographical and demographic terms and the South is more *Montenegrin.* This split is ultimately connected to the complex situation with the Montenegrin nation in relation to the Serbian one and leads to what political scientists call the statehood problem. The statehood problem occurs if one of the criteria for statehood (state power, state territory and people) is not sufficiently met. In Montenegro, while the state-building process was finished in 2006, as we shall see later, the nation-building is still ongoing and thus poses a challenge to democratisation and did so in the 1990s as well (Milačić 2018, 108).

The cleavage between Podgorica (renamed from Titograd in 1992) and Belgrade intensified with the dawning of the Kosovo War in 1998. The political elite in Montenegro wanted to stay neutral, but as part of the federation this move only angered Belgrade and did not delete Montenegro from NATO's list of strategic military sites (Morrison 2018b, 158-159). From 1998 onwards, as the situation became ever more unstable with the fourth war starting since 1991, the Montenegrin elite started to build national political institutions next to the federal ones that reported to Belgrade. Their key motif and mantra to justify that move was a sought independence of Montenegro. In this process, the currency was changed to *Deutsche Mark*, the status of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church was elevated, and the non-sovereign state of Montenegro even established a foreign minister in 1998 (Morrison 2009a, 177). As the

population was caught in an ethno-nationalist division, and the frontiers hardened throughout the 90s, the civil society too, was centred around religion or ethnicity. Because of these factors, a civil society in the broader sense, encompassing all inhabitants of Montenegro, only fully realised in July 1999, with a law on Non-Governmental Organisations (Milačić 2018, 119).

The elections in the late 1990s were won on the foundations of the portrayal of Đukanović as a progressive, modern and European-style politician who sought to engender reforms in that direction. The DPS founded and headed a political alliance bearing the name *Coalition for a European Montenegro* to solidify that image. Since that time, the international community, and especially the EU, had its eyes on Đukanović as a promising partner in the region.

The EU and the United States subsidised the Montenegrin project willingly, unconditional financial aid of 765 million DM flowed into the country from 1999 to 2001 from those stakeholders (Džankić and Keil 2017, 407). The accession prospect for the countries called the Western Balkans was first officially proclaimed in 2003, after Tuđman and Milosević ware ousted from their positions and a more democratic era was at the horizon in the troubled region (Milačić 2018, 110). The EU played a decisive role in the time after Milosević, as it set the terms for the Belgrade Agreement that was signed between Serbia and Montenegro. With this agreement, the federation between the countries would become looser, the name would change again to Serbia and Montenegro and the details for an independence referendum after three years were put to paper (Erdem 2017, 88-89).

3.8. Independence Referendum 2006

Đukanović and the pro-independence bloc used a narrative of a lost state in 1918 that could be restored in the referendum and argued that a sovereign Montenegro has a better chance to join the EU. The pro-union bloc on the other hand painted a picture of Đukanović as a criminal, with international courts associating him with drug and cigarette smuggling in the 1990s and accusing him of turning Montenegro into a private state (Morrison 2018b, 164). The conditions of the referendum set by the EU were at least 50 % and one vote turnout and 55 % in favour of independence for the realisation of the sovereignty; what the outcome was if the referendum would turn out to be between 50 and 55 %, the Belgrade Agreement did not state (Morrison 2009b, 49). The result slightly made the mark with 55,49 % in a referendum with a turnout of over 80 % (Sundhaussen 2014, 474).

During the referendum only minor irregularities were noted by the OSCE who oversaw the electoral process. The irregularities that the OSCE listed were unsealed ballot boxes and photographs of the ballot papers. Vote-buying, especially incorporated through a long-term system, flies under the radar of the OSCE; although some reporters noted suspicious activities, they could not produce evidence to prove their allegations (Morrison 2018b, 165). Montenegrins living outside Montenegro all over the globe in diasporas played an important role in the referendum. Those voters were under absurd financial challenges instrumentalised by both sides to change the outcome of the vote; Montenegro Airlines cancelled its Belgrade connection to complicate matters for Serbia-leaning Montenegrins in Belgrade and used the planes instead to pick up pro-independence members of the diaspora in their current countries of residence and fly them to Podgorica free of charge. On the unionist side on the other hand, the railway connection between the capitals of Serbia and Montenegro would become free of cost for a week around the referendum day (Morrison 2009, 216-217). The independence itself did not bring about any major changes of systemic nature to the state apparatus, as the DPS still occupied the most important positions within the Montenegrin state structure (Lazić 2018b, 228).

3.9. Montenegro and its Status Quo

Đukanović resigned from the position of prime minister after the referendum, somewhat dispersing the fears of his enemies of a private state through Đukanović' hands. His retirement from first-row politics was owed to his focus on private business interests; he nonetheless still inherited the position of presidency of the DPS and a seat in the parliament. His return to the position of prime minister came in 2008, after his predecessor struggled with his health condition and the global economic crisis. While the many civil organisations and institutions of the independence bloc saw the DPS as an ally during the campaign and in the strive for the goal of independence, within the new sovereign Montenegro, they began to take a critical stance towards the party and the power elite surrounding Đukanović (Morrison 2009b, 50). Before the referendum, this strategic alliance had empowering effects on the civil sector; after the law on NGOs passed in 1999, the civil sector rapidly grew, with 3600 NGOs and associations registered in 2006. The number of civil sector actors in the sense this thesis works with, where NGOs are political organisations that either advocate or educate citizen or monitor government activity, only represented a small amount of this number, as church

associations, hobby clubs and retired persons organisations all fell under the law. The fight for transparency and against corruption would determine the relationship between the civil sector and the government, which increasingly grew suspicious of the NGOs (Milačić 2016, 244). There were a number of assaults on critics of the government and the DPS in the years after the independence such as the assault on an editor of the major newspaper *Vijesti* in 2007 and on an intellectual in 2006 (Morrison 2009b, 52).

The freedom of expression is one of the main concerns of institutions and players like the EU and the overall political situation since 2006 has not been a success story; on the contrary, the BTI lists Montenegro as a defective democracy with decreasing points (from 7.35 in 2010 to 7.21 in 2020; out of 10 points), especially in the democracy status (URL 9). Other indices like the Nations in Transit by Freedom House and the World Press Freedom Index argue in similar dimensions (URL 10); repressive actions against journalists puts Montenegro only on position 105 out of 177 countries in the World Press Freedom Index in 2020 (URL 11). The economy of Montenegro after the Milosević era and its sanctions was in shambles and recovered slowly. The economy, measured according to the GNP per capita from 2000 to 2009 was positioned behind Slovenia and Croatia in the region only, not owing to the outstanding performance of the Montenegrin economy but to the even more disastrous economies of the neighbouring countries (Sundhaussen 2014, 521-522). Social mobility after the introduction of market economy was increasingly visible and even small farmers, the social group that ranks lowest within the Montenegrin economy, saw some benefits from the country's turn to a tourism-based economy and the following increase in land values particularly in the coastal areas (Petrović 2018, 215).

Social mobility must be scrutinised here. While it was possible in Montenegro just after the independence to get into a good position with merit, being in the DPS would make things easier, to say the least. The party had taken over the resources from the former League of Communists in Montenegro and since the neoliberal market economy was in place, members of the party successfully seized a large compartment of the economy as well. This network surrounding the party and its high officials exerts immense power and was a profiteer of the black market and shadow economy in the 1990s as well. In accusations made against him, Đukanović argued that the profits from cigarette smuggling during the sanctions due to the Bosnian Wars were used to sustain the state rather than enriching the ruling elite he was part of (Morrison 2018a, 106); in reality, the political establishment probably made a fortune on

the illegal market and bought their way into the legal part of the economy with the off-record money (Buchenau 2011, 250).

The regime of the DPS controlled both, the public institutions and large parts of the private economy, thus embodying a significant part of the job market and is consequently able to act as a gatekeeper. The clientelist structures that have been in place within the party (and its precursor) for decades now enable them to act as power centre within the market economy, an illegitimate one, as that power stems from privatisation of public companies and using the political structures to their interest (Džihić 2012, 92-93). In exchange for loyalty to the DPS, one can get access to jobs, educational opportunities and high-profile positions in state-owned companies or has advantage in public job tenders; in this system of power, rooted in clientelism, one can do without the party, but one cannot make it to the top. Barbara Geddes defines such a way of exertion of power through a party in a country as a regime and rates it more sustainable compared to personalist and military regimes, as the party and thus the elite can reproduce itself from within (Geddes 1999, 134).

Opposition and oppositional parties to the DPS since they were allowed in the early 1990s could never forge a lasting alliance against the ruling elite. They were fragmented over changing issues throughout their legalisation (Lazić 2018a, 149). The internal struggle paired with an opponent like the DPS that is systematically favoured through the resources at its disposal seems enough for the ruling party to stay in power (Vuković 2011, 84). Džankić lists five tools of the ruling party to stay in power: its control and abuse of the economy in the early 1990s, the support from Western powers in their will to weaken Milosević, the effects of long-lasting DPS infiltration of the institutions, a system of patronage and corruption and the ability of the DPS to adept and change their political position in the discourse (Džankić and Keil 2017, 408-409). The regime Montenegro, in line with global trends, can be defined as competitive authoritarianism after the reformist time of the years prior its independence. The DPS and Đukanović himself have been very successful in providing enough stability and reform will (not necessarily reforms) to retain external support from the EU while keeping a tight grip of power through institutional and informal mechanisms (Bieber 2018, 340). With Montenegro no longer listed as a democracy in the Nations in Transit report as of May 2020, the conclusion of the Montenegrin communists at their last congress that was held in April 1989, comprising, among others, Milo Đukanović, regarding the introduction of a multi-party system in

Montenegro seems to have shown the way forward: *more parties do not mean more democracy* (Morrison 2009a, 87).

Sociological studies like the one of Borislav Đukanović published in 2018 point to a strong anomic stance towards politics and the state in the population. His approach finds differences especially along class lines (Đukanović 2018, 200). In these circumstances it is especially surprising that the *Odupri Se* movement was able to gather tens of thousands of people in the street of the small country. The movement started due to the injustice seen by many citizens after a video appeared in December 2018 that showed Duško Knežević, a businessman, handing the then-mayor of Podgorica Slavoljub Stijepović an envelope containing $ 100.000 to fund the DPS campaign. What has angered the public was not so much the video itself, but the mild or even absent institutional response to the criminal acts. The protest abated in the course of several months and had its highest attendance in March 2019. The protest movement started out distancing itself from formal politics and was eager to keep its distance from political parties of opposition and government likewise. Political symbols were even banned from the protests, as it should be civic in nature. As the number of participants gradually declined after its peak, and nothing was achieved, opposition parties were allowed to come as representatives of their party. Together with the opposition parties, the movement wrote an *Agreement for Future,* pointing out how they think things should be run in Montenegro, which later was symbolically signed in on stage during a protest. During my research in Montenegro, the movement took a *summer break* and participants wanted to take the streets again in autumn (URL 12-15).

3.10. Summary

Before the next chapter is going to switch to a more abstract terrain, it is important to boil down the crucial developments of this chapter once again, with concerns to the aspects I listed at the start: *social organisation*, *political system* and its *power dynamics* and the *embeddedness* in a regional and global setting. The social organisation saw a deep rupture with a supposed traditional pattern replaced by a nation-state in the 19th century. The political system followed similar developments, with the state taking primacy. This all happened when international players with geopolitical agendas not only watched but contributed to these developments. The Balkan Wars and the World Wars left the population with many traumas but did not change the make-up of the society.

The introduction of the socialist system on the other hand did. New elites took over as happens oftentimes with system changes. The new elite's party served as the gatekeeper for a public sector that was ever increasing during the socialist system and has not lost the closed-off qualities ever since. The totalising qualities of the socialist system together with a repressive regime, restrictions in some areas of life and a different mode of production made Montenegro quite different from other non-socialist countries. The system changes towards a neoliberal market and a democratic order, especially because it was accompanied with wars, thus became another critical rupture. The resilience of the elite to stay in power through this rupture and the turbulent times afterwards was remarkable but no coincidence. As the EU saw the need to integrate the region into its area of control for stability in the region, the elite presented itself as a useful partner and presents it throughout. Internally, the elite established a system of power that seems, according to the literature, to give just enough to just enough people to secure its power. While the critical voices from the civil sector grew in last years, those voices are increasingly becoming targets of the government.

4. CORRUPTION

4.1. Introduction

For many of my interview partners, corruption seems to be the primary symbol of systemic political failure. Especially the roots of the problem are often looked for in the past; continuities are sought after to give hints of direction for the way forward. For academic reasons, it is vital to differentiate between this function of corruption for my interview partners and corruption as an analytical tool in the scholastic sense. These two different functions offer different angles and perspectives. Corruption as an emic term, in the hands of my interview partners, can be described as a vehicle that allows my interview partners to navigate through their own situation in their country, to make sense of their position in the reality they live in. As discussed in the context chapter, a connection between the present and the past serves for conceptual safety. Corruption for them is more often than not a synonym that encapsulates all sorts of informal mechanisms. Finding a definition and delimitation of corruption represents a challenge in academia as well. Corruption as a research object is investigated in many different disciplines. The implications of the concept on politics and its influential role in political negotiations like the accession negotiations between Montenegro and the EU will be discussed below.

This emic version of corruption gets very commonly used in everyday conversations of all kinds of people. This phenomenon is a cornerstone of social life, its centrality induced Akhil Gupta to take it up as an object of investigation in its own right in his fieldwork in India (Gupta 2012). This circumstance of corruption's centrality in social life and its usage and deployment of many different groups leads to ever-changing and manifold meanings; to capture the term in a single definition is thus impossible, what follows is an illumination of some characteristics of corruption as a research object from different angles and a sketch of its qualities as a vehicle.

Besides the diverse meanings of corruption itself, the concept often gets put into the umbrella term informality, linked to and intertwined with other informal mechanisms such as patronage, nepotism, clientelism and patrimonialism (Ledeneva 2018b, 1). Whether or not different acts are considered any of the aforementioned terms is oftentimes only a matter of perspective, the same goes for the attribution of either morally just or unjust to these practices; some indicators and the shifting demarcation lines will be discussed in the

theoretical, as well as in the empirical part. One of the goals of this thesis is to show that corruption can be a fruitful concept to work with in areas and prospects that do to not instantly come to mind when thinking about corruption; there is something that can be learned from corruption for a notion of sustainable politics for example. Sustainable politics means that, instead of focusing on quick fixes and combatting symptoms, political stakeholder should concentrate on long-term processes that have to be rooted in a kind of folk cosmology about politics and connected to the life worlds of people. The core theme of this thesis is the centrality of corruption in the process of sense-making for people, the thesis serves as an advocate of bottom-up initiatives and the importance of establishing and especially executing a code of conduct. Transparency of the public sector and easy access of the public to this data is the first step for establishing long-term improvements to a system that ultimately should contribute to equity and fairness.

Corruption as an etic term, in academic analysis and writing, is another approach to the concept. It is treated as a research object in this case. In political science and in politics, normative theories about corruption are prevalent. They are used in the political arena and are important to the thesis for their formative power of the relationship between Montenegro and the EU. Their application and usage by political players grants them relevance, especially as some of my interview partners resorted to this normative application. This normative approach towards corruption, however, is scrutinised and assessed in the following chapter with the help of anthropological approaches. As example of an anthropological approach, Michael Herzfeld's theory of cultural intimacy constitutes the core of the thesis and its argument and will be confronted below.

This chapter takes up one of the standard definitions of corruption used by large international organisations and departs from that normative approach towards a more inclusive concept more suitable for reality and this research endeavour. Still, the relevance of the normative ideas about corruption are extremely important to the thesis, because they shape the relationship between the political bodies of Montenegro and the EU as well as the relationship between Montenegro and its citizens. The latter are equipped with high expectations by the EU. Expectations that are possibly unrealistic, as we shall see later.

After assessing the normative concept, a step back to the nature of corruption is done. The intersection between public and private, a place where borders are blurry, is at the heart of

the concept. Morality is another crucial aspect of corruption, as it is another determinant whether acts are even called corruption or not. In the end of the chapter, structural conditions are examined that hamper or nurture corruption. This should, along with the context chapter, allow for an understanding of the situation in Montenegro and serves as a basis for the empirical chapter to come.

4.2. An Approximation to Corruption

Corruption inherits various meanings as a word. It can be a component of small talk and major political arguments. It is conceptionally rather fluid. It gets used inflationary in newspapers, unfazed by the journalistic value of the newspaper in question; it can erupt as a topic in a pub and just anyone can contribute one or two stories and rumours about politicians and other people of public interest, irrespective of the level and status of the concerned person in the political arena; it can be used in parliament disputes as a ground for accusations to harm the political opponent's reputation and weaken their support. The different instances where corruption is used is always somewhere on the brink of illegality and immorality. Dictionaries most often list three groups of definitions: corruption as an illegal behaviour by powerful people, corruption as a departure from something that is pure, and corruption as the more biological process of decay (URL 16). For this thesis, the former two are the essential ones, while the latter is neglected.

4.2.1. The Standard Definition

The standard definitions for corruption most always have a normative impetus. The reason for this is quite plain, as these definitions are established by organisations that want to contribute to the fight against corruption. Because corruption is so neatly connected to other informal mechanisms, the idea of fighting corruption is equated with a fight for equity and fairness. When my interview partners address the need to fight corruption, they really want to establish a more just system overall. They address corruption because it is one of the symptoms that sticks out in Montenegro’s recent history for them. These normative definitions of corruption build on the model of bureaucracy as understood by Max Weber, where bureaucrats are role-fulfilling, disinterested professionals (Gupta 2012, 81). The normative character also stems from a perpetuation of a Western norms in the policies to fight corruption. The norms are taken for granted and are in many cases the chief reason for the failure of initiatives and activities; the context of the respective country is often

acknowledged but a serious consideration is in many cases a lip service and does not trigger implications in the actual anti-corruption campaigns (Holmes 2015, 298). These intra- and international organisations also perpetuate the idea of nation-state as the only possible way of organising and rarely give aid to entities that work on a different scale. In the same vein, NGOs reify the status quo of state imaginaries, either in fear of imminent precariousness or simply by focusing solely on other agendas (Gupta 2012, 62). The policies of the largest global players, the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) and *Transparency International* (TI), are shaped to be universal and a-cultural. Despite their fundamental difference in setup, with the IMF being an organisation of the United Nations and TI being a global NGO, they hold the lion's share in the global fight against corruption (URL 17-18)

When the context is taken into considerations however, it becomes clear that local practices can have a long-standing tradition and may also contribute to identity-building. Nevertheless, they get scrutinised in policies for their corrupt character (Shore and Haller 2005, 16). This happens for instance in contexts where the boundary between gift and bribe is not clear. The practice *baksheesh* is widespread in the Middle East, North Africa, sub-continental Asia and in Southeastern Europe, in Albania and Serbia for example. Baksheesh is an additional payment out of gratuity; a bus passenger would pay *baksheesh* to the bus driver after he gets off the bus. A straightforward translation is not possible in this case and if a translation is attempted, *tipping* comes closest. This translation confuses the nature of the practice, as the English word tipping is a similar practice but does not have such a distinct cultural meaning ascribed to it. The vast dissemination and durability of the practice has led researchers to regard it as a cultural phenomenon (McLeod-Hatch 2018, 151-152).

Practices as *baksheesh* make troublesome the establishment of a demarcation line between corruption and legit gifting; and as the policy-driven organisations want to raise to the task of universality, the most prevalent definition of corruption in many reports and policy briefs is *misuse of public office for private gain* (Kurer 2015, 32).

4.2.2. The Public and the Private

Trailing along this short definition come several presuppositions that are the basis of critique. The presupposition most crucial that will be dealt with here is the public-private divide. The divide between public and private in two independent and separate realms was introduced in course of the establishment of the modern state with its Weberian bureaucracy. This divide is

hence a Westerncentric one and does not necessarily reflect the life worlds of people outside (and inside) the West, as anthropological inquiries demonstrate (Torsello 2015, 186). Additionally, the divide is mainly analytical and not practical. Akhil Gupta, among others, has shown the arbitrariness of this divide in his study on corruption in India. Bureaucrats, contrary to the Weberian idea, exhibit private interests within their work routine and do so without any infringements of any code of conduct. What is more, they are perceived primarily as people by their fellow citizens, and not as state institutions, particularly in small-scale contexts. What seems to be utterly obvious still represents the biggest obstacle for a normative definition to work, as bureaucrats and officials are at the same time citizens, blurring the demarcation and rendering public-private and the dividing line *descriptively inadequate to the lived realities that they purport to represent* (Gupta 1995, 384).

Another area where the dichotomy public-private ceases to work is when it comes to outsourcing and privatisation. Both processes are nowadays essential for state organisation and have become a commonality in many countries since the liberal reforms following the 1970s. These mechanisms span from the public to the private sector and back and enable opportunities for corruption. Outsourcing allows for those opportunities even continually, as a new corruption opportunity materialises every time public tenders are published; something that generally happens in a recurring fashion due to fixed x-year contracts (Holmes 2015, 81-82). *Institut Alternativa*, a thinktank in Montenegro sees outsourcing and public procurements as especially affected and vulnerable to corruption as large amounts of money are put towards the free market, the number they state is 10-15 % of annual GDP for developed countries. These procurements take place in the highest levels and the high officials are also the main beneficiaries (URL 19). But there is a fundamental problem that arises when the state outsources services to the private sector. This problem is the different set of rules that apply for the sectors. Nepotism, providing jobs and opportunities for one's kin and family (or for any other acquainted person for that matter), is a regular and normalised process in the private sector, but is condemned and illicit in the public sector. Lobbying and legal corruption[8] provide for other examples for the inadequacy of the public-private divide (Kurer 2015, 32). The examples above all have monetary benefits for officials, but informal tools, such as

[8] Legal corruption describes acts that normally would fall under the category of corruption but are still within the confines of the law. This happens when a strong link between the public and private sector results in collusion of different players across said sectors (Kaufmann and Vicente 2005, 2).

employment schemes, and payments from officials to citizens are also commonplace processes to trade money or situation for power; electoral fraud is a global phenomenon and increases inequality within societies (Ledeneva 2018a, 421; Holmes 2015, 32). David, one of my interview partners, sees such employment scheme very hard to tackle because the OSCE is only there for a short period of time before elections. He goes on to describe favours that are expensive under normal instances in exchange for votes:

> *The model has kinda evolved, it's employing people before the elections, providing support to different issues. Once I was present in one of the Northern municipalities where one of the parties brought a doctor, a specialist from Belgrade who would then do check-ups and give medical advices in the hotel where he was staying to people that needed this kind of support, so they would come, he would give them a special advice, what to do, his medical expertise, and then, after that, they would be encouraged to vote for the ruling party.* (T3, 52)

The public-private divide above provides for an interesting situation. Researchers that are sensitive to the hermeneutics of language and who are vigilant about the reasoning of their counterparts portray this divide as obsolete; it simply does not fit the complex life worlds of their interview partners. At the same time, however, people sometimes use this simple public-private dichotomy to make sense of the system they live in. It is a categorisation that allows people to understand the state and its organisation. The above-mentioned seems to contradict itself, but it becomes important in the measurement. Measurement is routinely done through comparing the number of reported cases between countries and in perceptual surveys (Holmes 2015, 44). The latter is tied to the learnt pattern of what is legit practice in public sector and what is not. In surveys there is not much room for in-depth analysis that is the case with ethnographic study. In a survey where the linguistic and hermeneutic diversity is broken down into a scale, the fine lines people work with are being lost. Instead, they fill the scale with recourse to their learnt knowledge, which is perpetuating the public-private divide. The perceptual quality of the measurement poses both, a difficult and complex challenge to surveys and opens a pathway for contribution of anthropological and especially ethnographic research in the area of assessment of corruption.

To add to the socialisation of corruption knowledge, Oskar Kurer states that people all over the world do have a common understanding of corruption when it comes to the public sector

(Kurer 2015, 38). In my view, this commonality stems from two factors. Firstly, the common understanding about corruption, that Kurer's gathered data suggests, is a very narrow one; this narrow notion is presumably synonymous with bribes towards officials. Secondly, the understanding and the results originate rather from the learnt public-private divide than from the universal nature of corruption; Kurer suggests that the universality of the impartiality principle that public office holders should be an embodiment of is the explanation for this. If impartiality is not given, unfairness or inequality emerges. In this vein, corruption takes a place between social theory and ethics, or morality (Clammer 2012, 127).

4.3. Informality & Morality

The second definition of corruption in the dictionary is the departure from something that is pure. And pure in corruption's case means moral purity. In this definition, corruption is detached from legal standards and laws and put on the scale between good and bad in the respective value system. From an analytical point of view, this definition can be overlapping with the legal definition, but it could be contradictory to it as well. Something that is legally unobjectionable can be morally intolerable and vice versa. In general, the word corruption refers to legally and morally wrong activities in informal and formal settings. Because of this ambiguity, some researchers refer to the inappropriate nature of the word to describe the phenomena and prefer informality over corruption (Buchenau 2018, 294). The informal-formal axis appears to present the reality better. Unfortunately, informality spans over crucial practices and non-written rules and is such a large category that it becomes unworkable again. The editor of the *Global Encyclopaedia of Informality*, Alena Ledeneva, writes in its introduction:

> W*e use the word* [informality] *as an umbrella term for a variety of social and cultural phenomena that are too complex to be grasped in a single definition. In broad terms, we refer to the world's open secrets, unwritten rules and hidden practices assembled in this project as 'ways of getting things done'. Informal practices may escape articulation in official discourse, but they capture the 'know-how' of what works in their vernacular representations*. (Ledeneva 2018b, 1)

Corruptions and attached practices like nepotism and clientelism fall in the category of informality. For the sake of understanding corruption in the sense that my interview partners use the term, the informal processes of the formal institutions and the formalised and

structured ways of these informal processes are the key point. The unwritten rules in these informal processes are learnt and sometimes based on morals. Looking at some examples, in nepotist structures, one is morally pressured to favour one's kin; meanwhile, Akhil Gupta found moral obligations of the ruling elite to care for poor people in his study in India (Gupta 2012, 80); similarly, it is also normalised and morally legit for Pathans in Pakistan to buy the support of followers, in their case paid in kind, in Fredrik Barth's study (Barth 1959, 13). These three practices all have unwritten rules as a basis and could be frowned upon in anti-corruption policies, as they either favour the one with connection or the one with a greater monetary background.

From these considerations, the differentiation between *grey*, *white*, and *black* corruption[9] or scales from correct to incorrect corruption have made their way into the mainstream of corruption studies. This differentiation and the departure from a dichotomy are to be welcomed. Whether the corruptive act is correct or not is decided again based on morals and further calculations. Shore and Haller show in their Mexican case that corruption is labelled correct and accepted if the benefits of the deed trickle down to the rest of the population (Shore and Haller 2005, 13). Accordingly, corruption and other informal practices can have wider societal benefits. The act of *getting things done* quick and easy without having to deal with bureaucratic authorities helps people or even the state to run more efficiently. Informal economy and the collaboration between corrupt politicians and criminal organisations were in place in Serbia and Montenegro during the time when sanctions against Yugoslavia were imposed by the international community. Milo Đukanović, responsible for the economy in Montenegro at the time, does not deny allegations made against him, but argues that he smuggled and looked for help of criminal organisations to *feed the people* (Holmes 2015, 93-94). With this justification he paints a picture of a shared identity and generates an image of us (Montenegrin people caring for each other) versus them (international community). The identity-fostering quality of corruption is another of its key characteristics and is the vantage point of Herzfeld's theory of cultural intimacy as we shall see later (ibid, 22). While acknowledging short-term positive effects, it must be clear that corruption distorts the

[9] Arnold Heidenheimer categorises acts of corruption according to the perception of ordinary citizens and elites. While black is condemned by all, and white is more or less tolerated, grey corruption encompasses acts where the views differ between in inside the groups (Holmes 2015, 9).

distribution in a way that it always has negative effects in the long run, indicated in inequality, insecurity and unequal opportunities.

Acts that are considered corruption or illicit informal practice sometimes fly under the radar of legislation. In some cases, they are only morally prohibited and punished in such a way. An interesting example of a large organisation using the moral or ethical concerns to stand in for insufficient legislation is the European Union in recent years. The so-called *Double Irish* is a tax evasion scheme used by large corporations that uses loopholes in the legislation practically and quite openly to circumvent the companies' tax duty. The EU was not able to close these loopholes within a reasonable time frame (Ledeneva 2018a, 421). The circumvention of rules is always faster than the establishment of mechanisms to fight them, something that is called legislative lag (Holmes 2015, 93). To overcome this problem, the EU made those companies using the *Double Irish* pay a fee on ethical grounds (Ledeneva 2018a, 421). Here the companies do not live up to the expectations of right behaviour and how to conduct business and pay tax in a particular entity, the EU in this case. The EU tries to set standards with laws but cannot entirely rule out loopholes for *wrong* behaviour. In the example, through establishing informal, moral rules to accompany the legal basis, the EU picks up a more sustainable and dynamic political answer to scotch an ever-present informal attempt to stretch the legal frame. The standards of the EU and the international corporations diverge, and exactly that makes the assessment of acts as corruption so particularistic, in the sense that the companies do not see the usage of loopholes as something wrong. Like this, bureaucrats in India and the state have different expectations of what is wrong and what is right behaviour in Gupta's study (Gupta 2012, 97).

Morality and the undergirding social values are at the core of the expectations and varying views on right and wrong. Following anthropological studies like the one of Gupta, two considerations need to be done when putting together corruption and morality. Firstly, corruptive and other informal acts can serve the cohesion of a group and can foster identity-building. These acts are functional to the society and thus are morally acceptable, even as some groups pay the price of inequal treatment. Secondly, there is no singular morality or system of values across a given society. Especially with ruptures and prompt transformations as is the case in the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the introduction of a neoliberal economic system, value systems do not get erased and replaced instantly (Torsello 2015, 189).

The morality that spread along the introduction of neoliberal policies can be seen as a normative Western project. This is important in the context of anti-corruption. As stated before, the ignorance of the context and the a-cultural makeup of anti-corruption policies are key points why such policies oftentimes fail to produce the intended outcome. What is more, the anti-corruption fight is overexaggerated and hypocritical, as it serves Western interests in the world system (Holmes 2015, 75). *Developing* countries and countries in *transition* are constructed as the corrupt *Other*. It should be clear that corruption is widespread in *developed* countries as well. The othering of regions such as the Balkan is done through stereotypical images of corrupt regions and is reinforced by scholars as much as by press coverage (Gupta 2012, 79). The nurturing of these stereotypical images is not done by foreign or international scholars alone, authors of the region take a natural part and act as accomplices in this venture. This may sound reproachful, but this can be traced back to an intensifying flow of concepts and ideas in the region and Europe in general. Intellectuals and politicians alike across the continent took on ideas, modified them slightly and handed them on to the next. What happened was a convergence of ideas that put the *Balkans* in a sub-optimal position, because stereotypes, if not manifested and tangible, were incorporated in a perspective of the region (Mishkova 2018, 121). This otherness is distilled in the word pair *Balkanisation* and *Europeanisation*. While the former is used to describe disintegration of coexisting things, irrelevant of small institutions or large countries, the latter is used to denote just the opposite, integration and adaptation into a European family (Gözübenli and Tekeshanoska 2018, 6). Balkanisation has its roots in the description of the demise of the Ottoman Empire (URL 20). Although it was not part of the Soviet bloc and strived for a position outside the East-West confrontation lines from the 50s onwards, the sheer geographical proximity made it difficult to delimit itself from the *East* and still is.

4.4. Importance of Structures

So far, this chapter dealt with the make-up and characteristics of corruption. It was treated as something that can be used, as a vehicle to get things done. But context and structural prerequisites need to be stressed in the same vein. The connectedness of corruption with the workings of the modern state leads researchers to consider corruption today as having another quality than the moral decay and corruption that is said to be one of the crucial factors in the downfall of the Roman Empire around fifteen hundred years ago (Holmes 2015, 1). The

difference in quality lies at the paradoxical association of the legal-rational bureaucratic structures of the modern nation-state with the inherent possibility and incidence of corruption (Shore and Haller 2005, 8). This fusion of corruption and modernity in analytical terms is worth keeping in mind, for this fusion argues that corruption is an intrinsic and endemic part of modern political systems and further sees modernity, with big waves of globalisation, as the foundation for making sense of corruption today (Clammer 2012, 114-115).

4.4.1. Structuralist Trap

When thinking about structures in research, falling into a structuralist view that treats structures as fixed is fatal. While acknowledging structures as shaping people's behaviours and lives, the structures themselves are in constant negotiation processes in which they get changed and change themselves (Holmes 2015, 77). Clammer sees morals, norms and personality as some of the key factors in understanding corruption. Some of these factors have been dealt with in the previous section. The individual's position within a system and the resulting opportunity structure are equally important to comprehend corruption (Clammer 2012, 117).

4.4.2. Situational Approach

For the situational aspect of the structural factors, there are several routes one can take. One way is to assign groups of people to elites and takes them as a heterogenous power network that settles down close to the source of power and money and uses its situation to stay in power. Another route could be to view the people outside these circles that provide power and status in a given system. Bourdieu's famous theory would suit both these cases very well, attributing more or less of different forms of capital to people depending on their position in the arena. In my case, I instead opt for Ulrich Beck's theory of risk society to explain the situational issue. He argues that wealth accumulates around the top and risk accumulates at the bottom. Overcoming the sole focus on inequality in distribution of wealth and thus departing from a fixation on income, human insecurity in the form of risk adds to a better understanding (Beck 1992, 35). In a complex system with rising uncertainty and thus insecurity, propelled by neoliberalism, people increasingly have a hard time navigating through their lives (Clammer 2012, 199). Safety becomes a main concern and instead of striving for something good, one settles with preventing the worst (Beck 1992, 49). Corruption

in this notion strengthens the inequality and insecurity of people in that it allows wealthier people to access more information and knowledge and at the same time disempowers people with less or no wealth by inhibiting the act of *getting things done* in an easy and sometimes shady way. In Gupta's study in India poor people suffered from systemic corruption. Gupta describes how corruption constitutes a form of structural violence aimed against poor people and other unprivileged groups of people (Gupta 2012, 21-22).

4.5. Systemic Inequality

Taking a look at the individual position within a society and assuming the morals of people are individual yet derived from a general set of morals and norms, informal practices and corruption cannot be studied in a serious manner without bringing in some notes on the specific structures (Holmes 2015, 77). The example of outsourcing serves as a solid exemplary point here. The practice is widespread across states around the world, and yet, in some countries the structures allow for more corruption to happen, in this case often in the plain illegal form; corruption opportunities exist throughout but are not used to the same degree.

Within the literature, innumerable factors and sub-systems are shown to influence the chance of corruption to happen, for this thesis, some important ones will be outlined and connected with the context of Montenegro: *organisational culture*, *execution of judiciary* and the *media landscape*. In the context chapter on Montenegro, a strong grip of the ruling party on the public sector can be discerned. That said, the organisational culture that should in practice favour personnel according to the principle of merit is not working as it should. With the power concentrated in the hands of a party and its party members, the party essentially controls the access to the public sector job market. This market is very large in Montenegro, as around 40 % of all jobs were located in public sector in 2016 (World Bank 2018). One can trade one's political mandate and act loyal to the DPS for a position in the public sector job market (Džihić 2012, 93).

The practice of getting labour through party affiliation is of course in place in many countries, but the extent of power over the job market in Montenegro and the situation on the general job market favour this practice. The public sector jobs offer security by long-term contracts and good wages compared to other sectors. Another factor adding to the attractiveness of the public sector is the large proportion of private sector that is only consisting of temporary jobs. These are seasonal jobs in tourism and make up for 20 % of the total job market, leaving

another 40 % for non-seasonal private sector jobs (ibid). As the road to public sector jobs lead through party bureaus, and the other jobs are either unattractive or temporary, Montenegro is facing, like the rest of the region, a massive outmigration of qualified people and thus a brain drain. Upwards mobility is hampered so much that young people leave the country very early on (Holmes 2015, 64). This involves professional personnel, such as health care workers and technicians, as well as blue-collar workers, adhering some sort of path dependency of the several waves of the *Gastarbeiterbewegung* of the last century.

The police force and administrative bodies that enforce the law is another important sub-system that decides whether corruption is prevalent. This connects with the former factor, as these jobs are in the public sector as well and if unwritten rules are in place that favour certain party members when it comes to fines, controls and the like, people are pressured to act in line with the party that provides. In the 2020 Montenegro Report by the European Commission the authors of the paper criticise the judicial system as being vulnerable to political interference (European Commission 2020). One of the mechanisms that should restrain and monitor the power of a government and regime is the media. Critical media outlets and the journalists that point to the corrupt practices of officials occasionally stumble upon thin ice, to use a drastic understatement. Examples of journalists being killed because they were up to something can be found across Europe in recent years, as examples in Slovakia and Malta show (URL 21). In Montenegro, the critical media outlets are working in a hostile environment and are faced with regular repressive and even physical attacks on themselves as well (URL 22)

These three factors, if diverting from a legit to an arbitrary and unfair system, make corruption opportunities more attractive (Clammer 2012, 118). These factors also allow for an increased distrust in the state and its officials (Holmes 2015, 23); electoral apathy and the large amount of politically disillusioned citizens in the region provide for a solid research topic in political science for a long time now. The turnout of the elections in recent years are very high in Montenegro, compared to its neighbouring countries, a fact that is connected with electoral fraud by critics of the government in the country.

4.6. Conceptual Evaluation

After sketching the term corruption and trying to pinpoint some of its inherent meanings, workings and impacts, it is time to evaluate the concept. Above, the critique of some

researchers towards the term corruption and their call for a switch to informality was spelled out. An exchange of a term for a yet another even broader term does not solve the problem in my opinion. In the start of the chapter, I differentiated between the use of corruption as vehicle and as stand-alone research object. The usefulness of corruption as a vehicle, as an emic concept that people work with, stands undisputed. In Gupta's and Herzfeld's work, corruption is used as just this, as a concept that people work with to make sense of politics. The second layer of corruption, the one where it is treated as a research object on its own and fostered to a large extent in normative studies due to their anti-corruption impetus, on the other hand seems to be a fruitless concept for analysis. What can be taken away from the corruption as a research object is that it allows inequality within systems, due to an unfair starting advantage for wealthier or more powerful people. This is not something that is unique to corruption; patronage and clientelism are related mechanisms, but as research objects they all lack a benefit for the social sciences. They are merely descriptive. They cannot grasp the reality of politics, they can serve as one of the fields where inequality is produced and reproduced, but they might be the wrong place to look for a solution to the inequal starting conditions. In this manner, research should bid farewell to corruption as an analytical, etic concept. For etic concepts, the umbrella term informality might serve better.

4.7. Cultural Intimacy

Corruption has much more potency as an emic term. Following Herzfeld's idea of cultural intimacy, corruption should be treated rather as a stereotype (Herzfeld 2018, 46-47). His theory, and corruption through it, is neatly linking individual and group *culture* to larger power hierarchies and power discourses. To be culturally intimate is to recognise parts of an official shared identity that are sources of embarrassment. It is to some degree an insider knowledge that bonds together people and associates them with a larger entity. This knowledge emits an aura of secrecy; it is kept secret and hidden away from people without it; this complicity in embarrassment has linking qualities (Herzfeld 2016, 7). Jumping right into the topic again, as my Montenegrin interview partners speak of the extent of corruption in their country, they do so a little embarrassed. This embarrassment is the key; it does provide a negative identification with the nation-state. This intimate knowledge and culture is constructed vis-à-vis an idealised West, that supposedly weathered the storm of an external corruptive threat and stands untouched and morally superior (ibid, 57).

In his work, Herzfeld stresses the strong similarity between corruption and incest in the social system. Both are generally disapproved, but also acknowledged by people. Incest and corruption can be seen as pollution, as something impure but still existing. And both take away and divert common resources to a smaller group that benefits from it out of self-interest; while incest diversion pools property within family, in corruption the resource is political power (Herzfeld 2018, 43). Within the small country of Montenegro, I argue, corruption can concentrate political power and property also very neatly in the hands of a few that are oftentimes related to each other. The kinship aspect within the political elite in Montenegro cannot be left unnoted. While an elitist circle could be examined here, cultural intimacy renders too simplistic the distinction into elites and ordinary people, as they all share this secret knowledge and the embarrassment (Herzfeld 2016, 6).

Corruption, or incest for that matter, never occurs to *us*, but always to other people. It serves as a stereotype to elevate one's own moral positions and strengthen the group's boundaries. With the concept of cultural intimacy, Herzfeld attempts to challenge the juxtaposition of kinship and the modern state; he contests the view that the latter was replaced by the former. These concepts were treated as mutually exclusive in the social sciences (Thelen and Alber 2018, 1). The evolutionist image that views kinship as constantly merging into the state towards a condition where kinship plays no role is still widespread but taken for granted for want of a better explanation (ibid, 4). This evolution from traditional to modern has taken place simply on paper; institutions seemingly take over the functions that were in the realm of the family earlier. But this is not the case, as the institutions are just the formal aspect of social organisations and the family still plays a pivotal role. Care work and the upbringing of children are just two examples. The strength of cultural intimacy is its all-level-encompassing approach. While I gave examples above of my informants feeling embarrassed about corruption in their country, a similar statement can be made for their state officials and themselves when confronted with EU accession negotiators.

4.7.1 Cultural Intimacy of Institutions

Montenegro is in the accession process with the European Union. This process was started quite some time ago and all chapters are open and negotiated about. This inter-state relationship can also be accounted for with Herzfeld's theory. The EU wants to be the solitary proprietor of a pure state of the union. A state wanting to join the EU must fulfil this pure

condition, ridden of corruption and other imperfections. By looking at Montenegro as a European internal other, corruption becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This has to do with the measurement of corruption talked about above. Herzfeld has shown the percentage of people that admit they have been approached by a bribe, whether they accepted it or not, does not vary and is very low in both Northern and Southern Europe. But the perception of Montenegrin people about corruption in their country, which is the main indicator for corruption indices, is influenced by policy papers and by talk and media coverage about EU accession. These processes reinforce each other to build up a simple truth and self-fulfilling prophecy: Montenegro is a pit of corruption (Herzfeld 2018, 49).

Stated before, the system in Montenegro does have inequal inherent mechanisms, and it will feel unjust depending on one's position in the social strata, but corruption is not an insightful approach to tackle this inequality. The EU, and Europe as an idea, do need an O*ther* to hide the embarrassment that many member states and Western European states are helpless in the fight of corruption in their own right. The Balkans or, more contemporary, the Western Balkans[10], is a discourse to put geopolitical players in their place and keep them there. Balkanism, the strategy of representing Southeastern Europe as an essentialist entity, is used to elevate one's own status, pursuit expansionist plans and possibly divert attention elsewhere (Kiossev 2002, 190). The entanglement of the balkanism discourse and corruption is striking. The balkanist other is something backward and lacking development, while from their viewpoint, the Western political players are just the opposite, modern and *civilised* (Todorova 2009, 3). This enabled a normative and patronising discourse after the Yugoslav wars and ultimately influences the relations between Montenegro and its neighbouring countries and EU countries ever since (Mishkova 2018, 165). The discourse is shaped by a rhetoric that de-values ideas and moralities that are not originating in Western context and set up a hierarchy of value that only the Western countries can control (Herzfeld 2015, 540). While these countries do so by default, all others are always on the painstaking path of making it there, but their wandering is more like waiting for Godot. Petrović exemplifies this in her work on the political imaginations of the Western Balkans. The EU is metaphorically pictured as a house, a family, or the future. For many of my interview partners, the idea of the EU as a future and a way forwards is uniformly shared. The states outside or on their way to those

[10] Countries in the Southeastern Europe that are not member states of the European Union.

metaphorical places are treated paternalistic (Petrović 2015, 111). And even if they are allowed to join the union, they still need to prove themselves, as the Bulgarian example shows. After the accession of Bulgaria to the EU in 2007, the country's foreign minister added that *Sofia will now have to convince other European countries that it is worthy of EU membership*, showcasing the idea of a clear hierarchy within the EU, and the new members have to work hard to join the elite circles (ibid, 116).

The fact that corruption or similar practices are alive and well in EU countries is not an attempt to make an accusation, but a return to reality. Formal structures and rules are always bent if the need arises to, and it certainly does not lack creativity in the departure of rules. This goes so far that it becomes questionable if a state and its institutions are in reality able to live by their own rules (Herzfeld 2018, 52-53). This is the same argument I made above; the formal needs the informal and vice versa. A restriction of politics towards the formal institutions and workings turns a blind eye to the reality of the situation. A sole focus on the institutions is like visiting Potemkin villages and writing travel reports.

Because EU represents itself as the archetype of a modern union, they do so in contrast to a non-modern or semi-modern other. The evolutionist notion of the modern state that evolved from a kinship-based society serves as a blueprint for a desired development. This notion is not only used by the EU, but also by civic actors in Montenegro and the other countries in the region. The Yugoslav activists of the civic movement *Otpor*, that ultimately toppled Milosević' government in 2000, portrayed him as a backward, conservative and anti-European leader while they themselves wanted to represent civilisation in contrast (Mujanović 2018, 133-134). By their utilisation of this dichotomous notion that was paved with stereotypes, they reinforced the evolutionary model and thus accepted the European primacy of ideas (Rajković 2018, 135). In countries that have joined the EU and now show authoritarian tendencies, their diversion from the EU line is termed as a return to older, even ancient times, a step back on the evolutionary ladder; analysts then often point out that premodern practices come back from the junkyard of history. This is a flawed analysis and only shows the long-standing ignorance of academia to recognise informal politics as something powerful rather than misnaming all informal political developments as returns of *traditional* ideas (Thelen and Alber 2018, 6).

The power of informal structures cannot be overstated. Formal and informal politics go hand in hand and are two sides of the same coin. Ledeneva compares formal and informal with yin and yang, as two parts that act together (Ledeneva 2018b, 5). In contrast to formal structures, informal ones often rely on a patron-client relationship. Those relationships are defined by reciprocity. It is within these relationships, that get re-negotiated over and over again that inequality and unfairness persevere within a larger system. Patronage, and other corruptive mechanisms, are negotiated behind closed doors in an informal way. Although the doors might be prestigious and leading to official offices of formal institutions, the crucial informal power is at work there. The reciprocity between the patron and client is one of mutual need. The client needs a job to feed his family and the patron might need political support. Herzfeld compares the situation with the dependence of the master on the slave; the relationship is hierarchical and ultimately the master is better off than the slave (Herzfeld 2018, 44). The fundamental inequality of the relationship is covered up by the argumentation along the line of mutual aid. This starting condition, the inscribed hierarchy and the effects on the greater group are omitted.

With the theory of cultural intimacy, Herzfeld came up with a refreshing input to the studies of social organisation and corruption as a part of it. With corruption crossed out as *the* object of analysis, as is the standard setup in normative studies and policy briefs, in the following chapter the empirical parts I gathered from interviews with people in Montenegro will be analysed. Corruption will serve as an emic explanation for the political system and as a stereotype and source of embarrassment that bonds my interview partners to their fellow nationals. Some aspects of the theory are not spelled out in this chapter and will be elaborated on once data is in play, as case examples make the theory more tangible.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter will take the empirical data I gathered, link it to theory and context, and thus find answers to the research question *How do NGOs and civic actors in Montenegro perceive corruption?* The data I gathered through the interviews that were conducted in August and September 2019 serves as a cornerstone in this venture. Several aspects that seem to be of importance to my interview partners when it comes to corruption get dissected. To present each aspect, anecdotes from the interviews are chosen that all connect to the research question of perception of corruption, whether direct or indirect. The anecdotes show how corruption as a concept enables people to make sense of the past and the present and can overshadow thoughts about the future. Furthermore, the examples made can be seen as stories that are embarrassing for my interview partners. They felt embarrassed because, while talking to me and, while opening up and letting me in on an open secret they share with their fellow Montenegrins, they presented the guilt to me that bears on the group of those who know (Herzfeld 2016, 6-7). At the end of the chapter, the impacts of corruption on the relationships between Montenegrins, NGOs, institutions in Montenegro and the EU are reflected upon. This connects the empirical data about corruption to the geopolitical aspects of discourse.

5.1. Corruption and Communist Nostalgia

> *(…) even that system* [Socialist Yugoslavia] *wasn't perfect, the differences were so, so little, for example, during the communist period, there was a huge scandal about public officials eating lambs on Žabljak, people were saying, how come they are going there and eating lambs and not working and we are working. (…) So that was the scandal. (T1, 72)*

Anja, the originator of the quote above, views the communist system, although pointing out negative sides in other parts of the interview, as a system where inequality between people was not as serious as it is in the current political system in Montenegro. The lamb meat in her example were thought of as luxury goods and common people were not able to afford them at the time. Because the topic came up in relation to the *envelope affair* that triggered the *Odupri Se* movement in 2019, I found the comparison between the two scandals noteworthy, because from first glance, they are of fundamentally different magnitude. But this only springs from the glance back into a past from a present with a different evaluation of value and worth;

Anja is a young woman, the lamb incident happened long before her birth, so someone must have told the story to her. The interesting aspect about the story is not the politicians involved or the political consequences, but the longevity and the use of the narrative. Anja is comparing corruption in the system in Socialist Yugoslavia directly with current politicians and Montenegro's present system right following the presented sequence above; what were lambs in the example above became yachts, real estate and money. Items are recognised as luxury only in relation to the economic situation in a country, so the substitution of lamb meat with yachts comes as no surprise in that regard. The notable aspect for Anja is not the object itself, the expensive lamb meat in her example, but the morals around the incident. She argues that morals and mentality have fundamentally changed and have done so for the worse. Corruption is connected with morals; and from the moral point of view the lamb feast and current examples as yachts or any other luxury goods are both seen as wrong, but corruption seem to have become more wrong in Anja's view, because within the system there is supposedly more inequality which is expressed through such acts.

Anja was interviewed in a group interview and her colleague Lazar was making fun of her for her alleged communist nostalgia shone through her arguments. Lazar argues instead that the socialist system was as bad in terms of inequality as it is now. For him, the inequality was the same. His central point was that only through the communist system this inequality was established. What became clear in their fight about whether Socialist Yugoslavia was as unfair of a system as current Montenegro was the mutual understanding about the situation in Montenegro now. Anja and Lazar lay different weightings on similar aspects in their contemplation about origins of corruption, but they have a mutual understanding about these aspects and the current situation. Both agreed on the consequences of the change in the early 1990s; for them, the inequality became disproportionate at that point. Anja and Lazar both belong to the group of professionals I worked with in Montenegro. As professionals that have a political scientist training as a background, the attribution of wrongdoings to the so-called transformation or system change after Socialist Yugoslavia is in line with the broad political scientist discussion.

Compared to the group of these professionals, the impact of socialist re-structuring was not so principal to most of my interview partners of the activist groups. When I asked about roots of corruption the answers of this group were either a reference to the clan-based system in Montenegro or a reference to the time after 1990. This omission of the period between 1945

and 1990 in their consideration could indicate a nostalgia of young people towards a mystified, allegedly better time where corruption was not a burning issue. While a certain amount of nostalgia was present in Anja's arguments, she tried to put it into perspective with her self-reflexive manner she has gained through her professional training.

The aspect of identity-building of corruption through both, negative and positive identification cannot be overstated. By assessing and judging the current situation the past is automatically connected to the current state and thus legitimises it somewhat by granting it historical progression. Longing for a supposedly better past is rather an assessment of the now by comparing it to a romanticised past than an objective evaluation of an actual past. In Montenegro and the region Yugonostalgia can be observed (Jansen 2016, 456). Some of my interview partners, especially the working professionals in the NGO sector, show traces of this nostalgia towards the socialist Yugoslavia. The nostalgia and the image of the past that is generated through this nostalgic gaze can be linked to a rising inequality by using Herzfeld's ideas and Beck's theory of risk society. Herzfeld (2016, 61) argues that while in the socialist countries the people longed for material wealth that was hard to get by, in the post-socialist countries the desired good is not so much material wealth per se anymore, but the security this wealth allows for. This security is tied to the image of a state that is seen to have been providing for all. People do not opt for the best, in this case material wealth per se, but are happy to avoid the worst and achieve some sort of feeling of security (Beck 1992, 49). The precarious state of the NGO sector in Montenegro according to my interview partners could trigger this longing for security and gives an idea for the strengthened sense of nostalgia among professionals.

5.2. Deterioration of Moral Standards

> *They really start thinking of themselves as gods, owning everything. (…) one man stopped in the airport of Tivat, parked his car where you can't park the car. And there was a communal police officer coming, say, just move car, and this person slapped him in the face. And he got arrested but immediately released and probably the police officer will get fired because this is the closest friend of the president.* (T4, 128)

The question of morality is important in the discourse about corruption as acts that may be illegal or unjust can be accepted by everyone if they are not morally questionable. As long as

people see a merit for the community or themselves in an illegal act or, by implication, see a legal act as a danger for the community or themselves, the act in question will be given a moral underpinning. This underpinning morality serves as a ground for defending the act against the law or justice system that rated it illegal in the first place or to fight an act that is legal by means of community support.

The above snippet exemplifies the notion of an immoral elite that is living at the expense of collective wealth. Through patronage, members of the group are pardoned from their deeds, even though they have done something wrong like in the airport example. Many of my interview partners pointed out the potential of Montenegro as a country, several comparing it to Monaco, if only the elites would work for the benefit of the larger populace. Through the notion of elite, they express the idea that certain people in their country have an exceptionally large grip on power. This concept is often linked and directly compared to the situation in other countries like Monaco or Austria; countries that are, as far as statistics go, better off than their homeland. Nearly all my interview partners referred to the situation and especially their elite as unimaginable for me, as an Austrian citizen. After explaining that Austria is not at all free from corruption and in fact dealing with ramifications form a large corruption scandal[11], they insisted on the differentness between corruption in Austria and Montenegro's supposedly tenacious more profound form. The elite is seen as the origin of deterioration of morals and the spread of corruption, as Vlado pointed out:

> *Here corruption exists, the main reason why you have corruption in lower level is because you have enormous corruption in higher levels.* (T7, 84)

Vlado assumes a trickle-down effect of corruption and morally wrong behaviour. When the head of the state is corrupt, people that are lower in state hierarchy will follow his example and become corrupt, too. The establishment of a group boundary and of a vague *them* that is the principal source of wrongness becomes apparent. This train of thought is accompanied by most of my informants with a vindication of non-elite people that fall back on morally wrong behaviour for reasons of managing their everyday life and survival. These non-elite people are then put into the category of *survival mode;* they are framed as victims of a system:

[11] The interviews were taken in the summer after the Austrian government stepped back after the *Ibiza affair*.

> *(I)n the economical system that doesn't allow them to provide for their family, so they think: ok, I am gonna have employment in the state and I am gonna have a permanent salary and I will do a lot of things to keep my job or to keep my post. (T5, 90)*

In his study in Serbia, Ivan Rajković found similar argumentations in his interviews: *We would all steal and cheat for our families* (Rajković 2018, 138). For an anthropology that is concerned with the social organisation this is intriguing. It can serve as argument for the power of the informal; even though formal rules are clear to everyone and misbehaviour is oftentimes punishable, the kin group is more important than the individual that belongs to it. Putting oneself at risk through offending the law to cater for the family is a process that Ulrich Beck describes in *risk society*. As material prosperity is out of question for most people anyways, taking minor risks as best as they can is the most feasible situation to opt for. The people are stuck between a rock and a hard place in that they are anxious about a vague, but much greater risk that is only experienced second-hand. The anxiety to lose one's status and standing within a group or society and become socially mobile towards the rock bottom is an abstract idea nobody would exactly put a finger on. Their fear is rather a foreboding of a future that is worse than the here and now (Beck 1992, 72). The risk taken here then is the perpetuation of an unequal system to at least not be on the most suffering end of the inequality.

The statement above is sympathetic for the people that need to utilise corruptive behaviour to reduce the chance to slip into precariousness. The marriage of the terms elite and corruption can be explained through this lens. People excuse morally wrong behaviour in face of existential threat, but as the wealthy elite is not vulnerable to this kind of threat, they are not pardoned. Furthermore, people that are categorised as belonging to the elite can use their resources to hide their corrupted behaviour much better. In this sense, while they are not as easily pardoned as people that use corruption as a way of surviving, they do not get caught as often, because they can hide it and even buy out of charges to a certain extent. Mayors and minor politicians get ousted regularly in Montenegro on the back of corruption charges, but any consequences of bypassing legal and formal mechanisms through corruption, clientelism and nepotism above the regional political level is found only seldomly (Gupta 2012, 91). The reason for this is the different nature of corruption across levels, as higher-level corruption does not involve as many people as lower-level corruption and thus is more concealed.

If the family members and people close to one's position are pardoned corruptive acts, the individual network and the family can be seen as a self-interested group in their own right. The morality of informal mechanisms and corruptive actions are suppressed for the sake of family responsibility; a responsibility that functions as a shared experience and locus of identity (Rajković 2018, 131). This morality is applied to the officials of the state that use similar mechanisms for self-serving reasons as well, albeit only if the official body is benefitting the situation of the individual in question. The justification that is used in this example is an explanation that is recognising social and individual flaws and thus humanises official bodies. This renders the state in its totality a little more approachable, because it thereby equips the personifications of it with culturally persuasive characteristic (Herzfeld 2016, 14). This bridges the experience the family provides for the individual to the official personnel that embodies the institutions. Naturally, this argument is not tried if the actions of the official body has a negative effect on the situation of the individual in question. In that case the manipulation of rules and accusations of hypocrisy are brought forward to meet the actions (Rajković 2018, 132). In both the positive and the negative case for the individual, however, the common sociality and the intimate cultural aspects between the positions are recognised (Herzfeld 2005, 3).

5.3. Justification for the Kin Group

To come back to the aspect of caring for the family that was put forward in the previous interview sequence, a reflection about kinship ties in an individualised state and the attempted usage of the kinship vocabulary and imaginary is necessary. As seen above, the family cohort seems to be the trump up one's sleeve. If one cannot fall back on family ties for support or, conversely, supports one's family members, the most prominent pillar of assistance is not given. Within the modern individualised state, the individual can seek support and help from the state. The access to this help then again can be obstructed by informal barriers, as Gupta's example of poor people's access to their payments and Pantović' study of seekers of maternal care in Serbia show (Pantović 2018). The state, through its imagined constitutive nation, tries to stand in for the services a kin group would provide. An imaginary that should foster the mutual trust among citizens and also individualises the responsibility to care for the proclaimed family that is the nation. The justification of Milo Đukanović for the smuggling and black-market economy, that was a quasi-official enterprise during the trade

embargo and international sanctions in the 1990s, sounds little apologetic and rather used to establish the frame of *feeding the family/nation* argument (Morrison 2009a, 190). With this line of argumentation, he directly references the need of the bending of rules for the sake of the family/citizens. Thelen and others proposed the term *kinning* for this establishment of a permanent relationship with a group of people by using language normally reserved for the family (Thelen et al. 2014, 108-109). This leads to the next point that some interview partners of the activist group emphasised. Because family and kin relations are so important, Bogdan, a white-collar worker from Podgorica, referred to an assumed path dependency. In his example, the status and institution of the father in his family and moreover in the wider society becomes clear:

> *It all runs in family. I have a problem with my CEO that my father is part of Demokrate*[12] *and I am not. I don't agree with their politics. And my CEO cannot understand it: He is your father. How can you oppose what your father says?* (T8, 35)

The justification by Đukanović on the grounds of kinning explained above and the path dependency idea of my interview partner Bogdan need to be examined. While the former clearly uses political framing to present his political actions as inevitable and altruistic, the latter underlines a strong systemic force that is infused in the whole political and economic system. Both taken together, they demonstrate the positive and the negative side of kinship in a system and shows how vivid ideas of kinship can be in a modern political system. The persistent strength of kinship ties was often connected to cultural factors by my interview partners, Lazar formulated it like this:

> *(I)n our Mediterranean countries, there is a kind of reluctance to obey the rules, to act according to a system that is kind of, amoral familyism, where family ties or clan-based ties are much more important than the ties between official relations between the citizen and the government and administration.* (T1, 90)

The task of attributing characteristics to a region so vast and spanning so many totally different countries while in the same step describing the current situation in essentialist terms seems fatal. By default, arguments that build on this essentialism set the area of possibility of what

[12] Demokrate = Democratic Montenegro; 4th biggest party in Montenegrin parliament with 10 % in 2016.

can happen in the future. The utilisation of an explanation that has its core in a mystified past, in this example *amoral familyism*, caters for essential qualities that are denied eradication and instead are given the property of immortality. This essentialist notion is the foundation of the stereotypes about the *Balkans*. Regarding family in a larger context of social organisation as something backward or improper mirrors the argumentation line of the modernisers of the 19th century, both in Montenegro and in the larger European context. It indeed is still part of an argumentation line in the EU accession negotiations and the perpetuated image of an evolutionist social organisation, evolving from the individual's main identification point of the family to the nation-state. In essentialising some pre-modern qualities, Montenegro and the Balkan in general, are portrayed as mere ill-conceived copies of the *real modern states* that have already reached the highest stage of evolution. Essentialism as a theory to explain the social may be disregarded in academia, but it nevertheless is present, and even pervasively, in the social life (Herzfeld 2016, 32).

For my interview partners, the power of the current elite is also presented in kinship terms. It is not just the nuclear family that is included in the consideration, but a much larger group. The discourses around clan-based organisation and belonging to different power circles have similarities on a conceptual level. The elite circles are often thought of as families that share the power within their own, kinned people. The now-president Milo Đukanović can serve as prime example as a base for that discourse. Not only did he inherit the political status from his father, he, too, distributed power towards his own kin; his brother Aco, his sister Ana and his son Blažo are more-than wealthy and have access to the levers of power themselves now (Dragičević 2020, 53).

Bearing in mind the history of social organisation in Montenegro, that might have included clan-based organisations at some point and time, the analogy of the current political power-holders with the organisation of earlier times some of my interview partners described seem to be coherent. While the idea of remnants of any earlier social organisation is more harmful by reinforcing stereotypes than it is helpful for academic progress, the usage of those ideas by my interview partners to make sense of their situation justifies the approach. At any time, it has to be clear that a clan-based system in whatsoever form is crucial to the present, but in guise of the discourse that is shaped around it. Herzfeld argues that while some traces of patrilineal and patriarchal ideas can be traced back to the segmentary property of the groups that lived in any place, it is the application and adoption of these ideas to make sense of the

everyday occurrences that is the object of interest for anthropologists and this thesis (Herzfeld 2018, 40). The embarrassment because people are aware of these non-modern particles in a modern world is adding to the narrative of distinct identity and this awareness allows people for cultural intimacy with each other.

There is another angle to these informal parts of life that are perceived as non-modern. As noted above, the gaze into the past is oftentimes rather an assessment of the present. While the informality that causes exclusion and inequality give rise to the feeling of embarrassment, there are other feelings that are connected to the non-modern past, and thus also to informality. The neoliberal way of life isolates people from each other and this becomes visible in the working place, argues Rajković in his study about post-socialist Serbia. Because privatisation of large factories took place, the once-friends and co-workers had to fight for the drastically reduced number of jobs. Rajković presents some empirical data and snippets that show the increased importance of family structure vis-à-vis the acquaintances and friendships that could arise from jobs or leisure time activity (Rajković 2018, 146). The non-modern allegiance towards the family opposed to the modern, (neo)liberal idea of the individualised person is seen as positive, because family seems to be more reliable. This brings back to mind Beck's idea of preventing the worst, rather than aiming for the best, because settling with one's own kin is considered a safe option.

Within the different ideas of what the roots for corruption is in Montenegro and what the inequality and the systemic malfunction is generally traced back to, the derivation from the clan-based system played a prominent role for many of my interview partners. At least half of them, no matter their professional or activist affiliation, mentioned the clan-based and historically strong kin relations as connected or as chief culprit for the case of corruption in Montenegro.

5.4. Corruption as Remnants of a Clan-Based System

Corruption accusations most always play in the realm of breach of moral standards. Politicians who are accused of corruption are punished because this breach has found its way into the law and is therefore punishable. Corruption of a system, however, is more abstract and more difficult to pin down and punish. If a system is systematically corrupt, certain stereotypes are brought up and used to delegitimise the corrupt act within. In the Montenegrin case at hand, these stereotypes are rooted in parts in the modernising era of the 19th century and still are

in use today. The stereotype most classic is the one of backwardness. As noted earlier, the modern nation-state raises the claim of monopoly in the social organisation. To do so, earlier forms of social organisation and forms that could take away power, are combatted by the state's perpetrators ever since the idea of nation-state came up in the 19th century. In the interviews, too much kinship and family ties and ergo too much informal power structures, were said to be the main obstacle of the anti-corruption initiatives and thus the chief reason why corruption exists at all. These informal structures that are sometimes based on kin were directly related to the clan-system that was in place in some parts of Montenegro over 150 years ago. The question if this organisational principle really survived or if this is just the modern interpretation of a similar excluding mechanism cannot be given here and is not the main interest of this thesis. What is striking, however, is the prominence of the explanatory pattern in the interviews. My interview partners brought the clan-based system and the clans up on their own behalf and used it to account for the political system they live in:

> *(T)his is maybe important for you to understand. During 17th and 18th century Montenegro was divided in something called tribes; people still connect to that.* (T8, 57)

In the context chapter I tried to show how often the social organisation in Montenegro and the region experienced ruptures and major changes within the last two hundred years. Any original parts surviving would be rather unexpected, taking the turbulent history into account. What could have survived is some ideas that are re-negotiated over time, and through generations, and the discursive anchor they provide for. This re-negotiation is entangled with the stereotypes about the *Balkans* again, as these *backward* items of social organisation are utilised to localise causes that are of essentialist nature. Informal politics and corruption are intrinsically tied to and part of this imagination of a survival of clan-based organisational portions.

Corruption and other informal mechanisms are bound to a world seemingly without order; this world stands in stark contrast to the world of the modern nation-state and its rational foundations. To attribute backwardness to the concept of corruption by rooting it in a past allows for activists to strive for a more modern version of a state, where corruption is ridden from the state. This backwardness argument already came under scrutiny in the previous chapter because it assumes that the organisation that is demanding high standards, in this

case the EU, has reduced the power of informal mechanisms like corruption and the like in its own structure; an argument that is ultimately proven by the corruption perception indices, but could in reality only be an institutional attempt to gaslight and divert from the same problems within the EU.

> *(…) extremely regional based, they have this regional based loyalty, so, for instance, you have this municipality, which is pretty much based on some former administration, tribal, clan, and those and so on and so on.* (T5, 76)

The above sequence of Matija, a professional, goes to show the evolutionist idea in implementation. The evolution goes from clan to an administration in the kingdom of the 19th century and is finally completed with the integration of all smaller organisational units into the modern nation-state. One of the cruxes of this evolution is the assumption of total replacement smaller organisational units. The new entities always base on the earlier, and the identity-generating, and in the above example creating obligations due to loyalty, date back to the earliest idea of social organisation in the region. The trick of dating things back into a long-gone past ascribes an unfathomable and mythical character. This myth is then able to fill in where other explanations concerning the social organisation do not work. A comprehensive understanding of only the formal aspects of the modern nation-state is a challenging if not impossible assignment for itself; all the workings of the state and its personnel that are not performed openly and in public and instead constantly traverse between official character and secret agreements, informal politics and actions with corruptive character, are beyond anyone's comprehension.

To explain these workings, some of my informants troubled the notion of a mystified clan-organisation to explain for the imperfections of their conception. Through this quick fix for explanatory reasons, several things happen to the situation. Firstly, by using an element that is associated with the past and furthermore labelled backward to explain current informal politics, the idea of informal politics as something essentially backward stiffens. Secondly, and by extension, countries that are found to have too much informal politics and therefore most probably a corruption problem, are characterised backwards as well. Recalling the EU accession of Montenegro and the fixed mono-directional claims and assessments of the process, utilising the clan-organisation as a main cause of the systemic inequalities becomes problematic because it denies the agency of current and recent political actors. If the clan-

based system is one of the main roots, and if these roots additionally are taken too determining to be changed, this argument amounts to be a bankruptcy declaration for any independent politics. This argument then is the implicit justification for a paternalistic political stance towards Montenegro on the part of the EU (Petrović 2015, 111).

5.5. Informal Mechanisms across the Board and through the Levels

> *(…) because all institutions are corrupted, not free, we have one system in the system.* (T6, 110)

Recalling Ledeneva's point from the theory chapter, formal and informal politics always come together, and the informality cannot be overemphasised; yet, this aspect is severely under-researched (Ledeneva 2018b, 5). The brief snippet above really underscores Ledeneva's argumentation. In Milo's statement he sees the formal institutions as corrupted; the system within the system is probably the informal, opaque mechanism within this institution. We can call it the informal side of the coin. Calling this informality corruption is a legit point insofar as the rules for this system within the systems are not made to benefit the population at large. If rules for the informal side of the institution could be made and if those rules then could be monitored, it indeed would not be informal anymore. The informal institution instead would have to be given a rapport system of the informal side every once in a while, to keep the disproportion, that my interview partners saw happening since the 90s, at bay.

The quality of the formal institutions is suffering from its bloated informal twin. If a healthy institution is pictured as a human being, a corrupted institution would be a hunchback. You could see from afar that something is wrong. The formal side is not able to cater to all the requests properly, because the informal side takes up so much of its resources and attention. Institutions that favour people due to their connections and filling of their purses lose credibility and trust among the people.

An exemplary account for a distrusted institution is the *Agency for Anti-Corruption*. It was installed in 2016 as a lip service to the fight against corruption that was demanded by the negotiators of the EU in Brussels. While it the judicial framework concerning the fight against corruption got better ever since and even is rather progressive, as David told me as an expert, the implementation of these laws is the crucial and missing part. Maja, professional herself, shared this story of the biggest official institution in Montenegro to fight corruption with me:

> *The director of the agency (Agency for Anti-Corruption) took a loan from the government to buy an apartment, the government that he is supposed to control, the political players in the government that he is supposed to control, and then they control the amount of money he gives back or he doesn't even have to give back the money. Who is gonna believe in this person? And then you remember that this person has family ties with the prime minister, so, you know… I don't understand how people get shocked that people don't believe in institutions. They don't believe in institutions because institutions fail them all the time.* (T3, 36)

The distrust in official institutions led to a growth in popularity in the NGO and CSO sector. While the offer to report corruption or conflict of interests is available by the Agency for Anti-Corruption, people rather call upon the watchdog NGOs and other players committed to the fight against corruption. Still, the CSO cannot and does not want to take over all the functions of the state. As people do not always have a way around it, people are reliant on those institutions. In the sense of Beck's risk society, one can understand the activist Emina and her succinct claim:

> *You are crazy if you don't use corruption where you can.* (T10, 127)

The alleged craziness is stemming from a sheer pragmatism of someone who knows their way around in the system. She learned to evaluate situations and thinks she can speak on general terms that in most cases using corruption or informal ties and mechanisms is the best way to go in terms of resource management. In that train of thought, she is clearly not having the elite circle in mind, but she speaks on behalf of a common people, of ordinary citizens in Montenegro. As before, the usage of corruption is vindicated by being a non-elite person or at least not getting branded as one. And this thought is carried a bit further down the road, if common people use corruption or informal mechanisms to get better within a state, their knowledge and their way around the system can indeed be seen as a *weapon of the weak*, to follow James Scott's work. In his work about peasant, he alarms not to romanticise the acts of defiance, the acts of class struggle, in his words, are similar in kind to the ways in which people try to stay afloat in the system they think to be of corrupt. Scott sees three feature of these acts and I argue they are applicable for informal coping strategies as well that my interview partners portrayed me as well:

> *They require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms.* (Scott 1985, 29)

The reason for falling back on informal practices, structures and mechanisms are manifold. The main reasons are the difference in service quality, the time the service provider needs for processing and the affordability of services. In the interviews, the education system, the healthcare system, grants, state support, and fields in the private business such as the real estate market and so forth were mentioned. Long waiting times for operations in the hospital can be fatal, sub-par education for children and adolescents spells disaster for the future and services may just be much more expensive. Argued like this, the dilemma is obvious; those who can afford more expensive services and wait longer can stay out of the area of effect of the corruption and the informal games in the institutions, as Anja's comment shows quite plainly:

> *(…) much, much longer, you don't get the best service, and sometimes you have to pay much, much more. If you can pay for all of this, you don't have to participate in the state system, but most of the people can't, so everybody is trying to get by and everybody have to know people.* (T1, 87)

The informal networks of family, friends and acquaintances are pivotal in generating the possibilities of the ego in question. For substantiating this argument, one can look at the OECD reports on education. The informal networks as family and family's friends and the opportunities they facilitate foreshadow the success in the education system and thus the likeliness of a successful career (OECD 2018, 163). While Montenegro is not part of the analysed states, the evidence is overwhelming in the countries that are part of OECD sample. Inequality is reproducing itself in the educational sector and Thomas Piketty urges the domestic (informal) environment as the key factor of success in both the educational system and the career that follows (Piketty 2016, 94).

The argument of education exemplifies the significance of informal structures for the individual. The family and networks a person is born into is of utmost importance. This unequal starting advantage is interestingly regarded outside the realm of morality at first. The same advantage, however, moved into later life stages, very well has a moral undertone. Inequality is put into cradle, but only gains a moral rating when the individual can act as an agent.

Morality is thus bound to agency of people. For the individual with a strong network, and especially with informal ties to official bodies, the path to a career may seem like a cobbled street. The usage of informal ties to influence the official realm is a definition of patronage. Now for the individual without a strong network in the official realm, or even worse, born into a family background that is ostracised by the ones in power, the cobbles are not used to pave a road but to build walls and barriers the individual has problems overcoming. Corruption and advantageous informal structures in this scenario serve as markers in the evaluation process of the individual on a moral scale. The scale has a crucial twist, though. As seen before, the usage of informal advantages and corruptive actions, is only really being condemned if elite people, or simply better-off folk use it. To the moral scale the factor of class is added. The *us* versus *them* situation the discourse about corruption creates can be regarded as a classic setting of boundaries. Following Barth's reflection on group identity, the essential aspect of groups is the *boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses* (Barth 1969, 15).

The argument of necessity plays a major role in the justification of informal mechanisms when it comes to rating them on a moral scale. Another scale corruption is rated on is the severity. Smaller corruption is easier pardoned than large-scale corruption. The prosecution interestingly is showing a disparity in cases that make it into court. Small scale corruption happens with many people and small amounts and deeds and thus can be traced back more easily (Gupta 2012, 91). Rajković's work elaborates on the justification for normally sanctioned behaviour in reference to alleged *big* corruption of the elite (Rajković 2018, 130).

During my interviews, as the situation in Montenegro was painted as a domination of a single party, there were some parts that point towards a larger problem. While the power in the state is thought of as inherited through the hands of the DPS and Đukanović's circle, the opposition has shown some similar mechanics in the towns where they were able to win elections. David told me that through years of political routine and the ways things were done, these mechanisms of partisanship, or corruption of the communal employment system have been normalised and can be found in all parties:

> S*o it is a problem that opposition parties and the ruling political party has, and the issue is that it's really, really hard to control*. (T3, 38)

In a situation where two elite circles clash, as in these towns where opposition parties won elections, but are still in constant political skirmishes with the large party on a national level, they are both seen as elite by the people, nevertheless. In Rajković's research in a town in Serbia employment strategies of different communal and national political actors have divided the town virtually in half in the eyes of the *normal* people (Rajković 2018, 143). They nonetheless both are seen as elite circles, a fact that puts their actions under more scrutiny automatically. Both elite circles exhibit an exclusionary approach in their system of informal favouritism, that is to say that there is a hard edge that delineates the allegiances. These different circles then again use the notion of family; the ordinary people belong to the family the politicians have to provide for (ibid, 131). This kinning of political responsibilities is just another issue that unfolds the impossibility of treating the individual level as autonomous sphere. What starting advantages, class lines and coping strategies all have in common is the need of the individual for the informal sphere and its networks of relationships.

5.6. State Apparatus and Public Sector

The discussion about institutions and the way people live and manage to get their best out of the situation can be taken and put to any other country and it would fit neatly in most contexts. There seems to be a certain make-up of the Montenegrin public sector, however, that is worth exploring in more detail. Some of my interview partners see the public sector as relic of the socialist Yugoslavia, and as the party is, apart from the name, the same, this thought is fathomable. Matija offered me an insight on his idea of problem in the public sector, that is the unchanged work morale:

> *It's pretty much, your salary are low, it's mostly 450-550€, you don't have any motivation, because everyone in the young age, who enters the public sector has this motivation of energy, but quite soon, after a couple of years they are demotivated, why? Either you work or you don't work, it's the same. You'll get that paycheck, and that is the worst thing which is left from the communist system. This permanent contract, you get a permanent contract, and there are no mechanisms of punishment, if you fail at your job or if you don't do your job properly, so this is why people quite soon get demotivated.* (T5, 30)

Although it is a safe job, the reward system in the public sector seems to be absent, as is the accountability. The importance of accountability is put forward in higher political spheres,

where politicians admit their errors and resign. On the level of common people, however, there is nothing to resign. People are not getting fired for showing apathy, Matija continues. Demotivation and apathy in the workplace are far off any illegal behaviour, but the credibility of the public sector is endangered, nonetheless. In the interviews, the people working in public sector jobs are not blamed or put under general suspicion, they are again seen as individuals who are fighting to live in a system. For my interview partners it is tragic that the public system is not merit-based, but it is not tragic that people work in it. They explicitly try to avoid generalisations, but they are never unaware of the systemic inequality in employment policy in public administration, as the snippet of Lazar shows:

> *There are some people who are really good and that work there. I mean, we are critical, but we cannot say that they are all corrupt and bad, there are some brilliant people there as well who work, but I think they are there because of chance or because of some circumstances. The overwhelming policy of employment is based on other things, other than merit*- (T1, 107)

Working in public administration is seen as an admirable goal, as it provides for safety, food and future. One of my interview partners that works in an NGO not even corrects her grandmother when she tells people that her grandchild works in public administration, because for her grandmother, job safety for an entire life is among the most important things to have. Anja goes on to widen this attitude to the people in general, as she outlines the perfect career path as a two-step process: first school, then public administration. The remnants of socialist employment schemes, or any large public employment schemes for that case, are hard to come by and cutting down the public sector endangers votes in upcoming elections. There is a difference, however, in trimming public employment to sufficient structures and render them more reliable and efficient for the people and keeping large structures for reasons of securing future votes. There are two issues all my interview partners could agree on, one is the importance of improvement of public administration, and the second one is the problematic image of public administration as a giant vote machine.

Bogdan describes his situation as hopeless for finding a job in public administration, simply because his father has a certain party affiliation. His attendance of anti-government protests obviously makes his situation worse. From the perspective of Bogdan, who perceives the government as a closed elitist circle, some ways to cope with the situation are available and

put into use. Coping strategies involve avoiding, confronting, and arranging. Before the coping, however, comes the assessment of the situation and the moral evaluation. To Bogdan, the elite came to power illegitimately and by ways of immoral economic action that harmed the public wellbeing. The damage to the public good is rendering the elite's actions as violating the moral code for him. As illustrated before, the helping of one's kin into a position, patronage, is then ascribed an immoral aura.

The same action would be excused if it would not involve members of an assumed elite, but people closer to Bogdan's position in the social field; arguments for justification would have probably revolved around the necessity. The crucial act done by people like Bogdan is the drawing of the line, where necessity starts. This is a fine line and the elite justification may look extremely similar to the ones the *common people* use. If the government and the inner circle do refrain to illicit actions, the citizens, according to my interview partners, are taking whatever measures they can in a struggle where their starting condition is so poor. They assess the situation by dividing the whole group in two categories, *them* and *us.* This step of assessment still assumes a common denominator between these categories, in the Montenegrin case the citizenship, and probably the nationality. By putting the elite in the same overall category as themselves, the people recognise the cultural likeness between the ordinary people and the better-off circle. Through a resemblance the identity, in this case the national identity, is generated and fostered by assuming the same game for all the participants, although the game is a rigged one (Herzfeld 2005, 102). The acknowledgement of the same game and the knowledge of its rigged characteristics can be a shared sociality that provides all the people who know with a cultural intimacy (ibid, 3).

5.7. Coping Strategies

Individuals in any group share intimate knowledge about unwritten rules and mechanisms. They do also share coping strategies to make up for bad starting positions, some were pointed out above. In the state, as in other systems, people will get creative when it comes to fighting for their position. Even the ones in dire straits will develop means to get the best they can, although this best is not that great in an overall perspective. For this thesis not the actual usage of strategies, but the knowledge about them and the empathy for the balancing act people find themselves in is the main concern.

Avoidance, confrontation, and arrangement are the prime strategies to get by according to my empirical data. My interview partners sometimes pointed out to the non-imperative character of taking part in the system marked by an informal hegemonic order. One could avoid it, they argued, if money or time are not scarce resources. If one can afford to use private doctors, the need for gifting public doctors does not arise. Same goes for the social benefits; if someone is not in desperate need to receive them, they can wait longer instead of speeding up the process by means of links or money.

Arrangement or complicity is the strategies most often talked about in my interviews. In this context simply this means giving in to the temptation of using one's so-called corruption opportunities, or informal ties to put it less negatively connotated. Pulling strings to get better service or position than others, for my research participants, is a clear question of morality and position in the social system. People in higher positions, often referred to as elite or *them,* are not pardoned for the usage of patronage or corruption in many cases and are assessed on a moral scale. People generally referred to as *normal* people or *us* on the other hand use similar mechanisms and are ascribed the idea of need to avoid putting them on a moral scale. The actions themselves do not lose their foulness, but this foulness is of secondary importance when the circumstances are put into the considerations for many of my interview partners.

There is another sphere of interaction between individuals and the state that falls both in and out of the category of arrangement, although this can really be seen as some sort of non-interaction. If situations arise where the benefit of state intervention is smaller than the damage done by the situation itself, the state can look *the other way* in many cases. This is not a one-way street, as citizens also choose their fights and when to react to possible wrongdoings of the state after estimating the success of the interaction on their side (Herzfeld 2016, 66). This sort of arrangement represents the middle ground between confrontation and complicity. Yuson Jung coined this middle ground as *complaisance* in her research on the post-socialist, pre-EU Bulgarian NGO sector and shows how different actors use their agency to negotiate their position in a larger power hierarchy without necessarily becoming accomplice or part of a resistance (Jung 2010, 319). While her example deals with the institutional level, this middle ground also exists on the individual level; it connects people to the state and provides for a cultural intimacy:

> *Citizens may not like a particular state directive, but find that objecting to it leads nowhere and that accepting it violates their sense of comfort. So they simply play along with the discourse, let the state have its fun as it were, without substantively either endorsing or rejecting the directive. Officials and citizens alike are aware of this complaisance; it is a significant component of their shared cultural intimacy*. (Herzfeld 2016, 66)

The last remaining coping strategy, confrontation, was the focus in many of my interviews naturally. Without the public protest of the *Odupri S*e movement that formed after the institutional answer to one of the largest corruption scandals in Montenegrin history was effectively non-existent, the research endeavour would not have materialised. The lesson learned may be the vast knowledge of consequences by many of my interview partners, if someone decides to confront the state or the system. According to my data, intimidation was a strategy used by the state to prevent people from opposing or working not according to their idea. Not only are reports of disproportionate inspections in any area of life was a common topic, people that took part in the protests received warning messages on their private phones and were openly mocked by co-workers as well.

For many of these strategies, a demarcation line indicating the position in the social system must be drawn first. The synchronous establishment of an in-group and out-group in regards to the social situation by my interview partners can be seen as one of the first steps in the creation of an identity and also as an important step to making sense of one's own situation within a large social field. The statements and reasoning of the individuals I interviewed must be taken with a pinch of salt, however. It is a simplistic image that divides a large populace in two groups or classes. The imaginary division masks the commonalities these groups have. The common ground lies in the knowledge both groups share about the cultural basis between them, exemplified by the informal mechanisms and rules. Herzfeld introduced cultural intimacy for the acknowledgement of this common ground; for this thesis, his concept lays bare the workings in a state or any system that is not accounted for in the written rules and formal arrangements; these workings are significant, as the system would not function without them:

> *Bureaucrats and citizens often share a good deal of cultural ground and understand each other's desires and intentions; otherwise, what is called*

> *corruption would not be possible. An Italian policeman who did not understand what was being offered under the guise of a 'coffee' would remain poor, and he might also get into serious trouble with his superiors for creating unnecessary paperwork.* (Herzfeld 2016, 6-7)

The bureaucrats in the quote of Herzfeld above can be seen as the advantaged group, they can be substituted with the abstract concept of elites in my research. His example shows the intimate knowledge the different actors share and the advantages for the system, namely the grease that makes it run smoother, an observation several of my interview partners pointed out. Exaggeratedly formulated, sticking to the rules is a time-consuming and strenuous activity that sometimes does no good for none of the people directly involved. The crux is that corruption and exclusive informal mechanisms still do damage, but to the system. This damage might not be immediate, but the damage eventually outweighs the benefits (Holmes 2015, 39). While the people involved might not suffer from any consequences, the system loses its trust and this may lead people that do not have the privilege to have the right contacts to pack their bags and look for better opportunities in other places; human flight is one of the ways people cope with corrupted systems (ibid, 30).

One of my interview partners is an activist leader who tries to tackle the problem of flight and keep young people from leaving the country, as a massive outmigration took place in Montenegro in the recent years. These high numbers can be accounted for by the introduced liberalisations in the permits for working and studying in the European Union for Montenegrin citizens. Although the changes in policy can explain the outmigration to some extent, the sheer number of people going to foreign countries is massive. This human flight is preceded by the recognition of the cultural ground and the current state of affairs. By their decision to out-migrate, that is oftentimes based on questions of economy and justice, according to surveys of one of my interview partners, they demonstrate the intimate knowledge that the grip of power by political actors will not vanish any time soon. Not taking part in the system was called *crazy* by another interview partner of mine, demonstrating true desperation. Instead of using complicity as a strategy to cope with the situation, many young people use their cultural knowledge to avoid the situation and look for a more hopeful situation elsewhere. Speaking in Herzfeld's concept, they assessed the situation with the intimate knowledge they share with their fellow Montenegrins and concluded that avoiding is their best bet. Paradoxically, this action could link them more strongly to their starting point,

Montenegro through the using the intimate knowledge their Montenegrin identity offered them (Herzfeld 2016, 7).

5.8. Corruption and its Influence on Relationships

From the research question of *perception of corruption among civil activists and NGOs in Montenegro*, this thesis adds to the understanding of corruption the influence of its perception on relationships. The next section will take up these perceptions and analyse different interrelations. I argue that corruption as an idea helps people to navigate through their life worlds and make sense of their situation. I extend the importance of corruption as a concept to a constituting element of relationships across different political levels concerning the stakeholders of *civil activists*, *institutions*, *the state of Montenegro* and the *European Union*.

5.8.1. The Individual and the State

Taking the individual's perspective or the local level comprehension as a starting point is the anthropological approach for making sense of the world. By understanding the local, it is argued, the workings of larger contexts and worlds can be fathomed by virtue of extrapolating certain local logics (Herzfeld 2016, 120). The everyday practice then can become the nesting site for hegemonic ideology. People might be unaware of that hegemonic property that forms their relationship to institutions and the EU for example. Changes in the everyday practice only very gradually happen unless a fissure in the everyday happens; state collapses and outbreaks of armed conflict are examples of such fissures that happened in Montenegro's recent past. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the consecutive wars in the region and the consequential dire reality of the bulk of people during the 90s are such fissures.

The normal, or ordinary experience and the habitus of people are endowed with particles of a larger hegemonic order (ibid, 126-127). The subordination of civil actors in Montenegro to an externally prescribed perspective of an unbalanced relationship between the EU and Montenegro is just such a habitual behaviour that gradually established itself in academia and was shown to some extend in the previous sections. The position they inhabit as a result is precarious, as this relationship leaves no space for re-negotiation on their part and presents a fixed hierarchy. For Herzfeld, this inscribed and subconscious cultural differentiation is the

centrepiece of both, the everyday reification of nation on the individual level and the geopolitical struggle with supranational character (ibid, 126-127).

5.8.2. The EU and the NGOs

Without the larger geopolitical level, Herzfeld argues, and this argument is not new, the internal social relations between state-level or even local level power holders cannot be understood. The relationship between the civic actors I interviewed, the NGO sector, and the Montenegrin political elite are built upon expected action patterns politically more powerful actors have dictated. These action patterns have been transmitted to the following generations of political players and are sensitive to external influences and changes of paradigm in politics. These expected patterns are nothing more than the guidelines that institutions or players strive to fulfil. It can be seen in the embarrassment of politicians and of professionals working in the NGO sector that speak about Montenegro in the process of EU accession. The countries of the Western Balkans and Montenegro as part of it are constantly portrayed as unworthy, problematic and far from the status quo of the rest of the union. The portrait of Montenegro is distorted; the self-conception of the players in the civic sector is an image that is not genuine because large parts of it are taken over from negative attributions the EU uses to heighten its own status in the negotiation.

Looking back at the contextual chapter, two moments in the recent history of Montenegro reveal an exertion of cultural authority by external stakeholders quite impressively: The overthrow of Milosević including the referendum on independence in Montenegro and the *Odupri Se* movement in 2019. In both of these instances, political actors framed themselves in a way that ultimately lead to the then-desired result. But this framing came at a very high price, I argue, and over the years backfired to some extent.

The civic resistance *Otpor,* that went on the warpath against Slobodan Milosević in 2000, used a certain kind of framing to rally support from as many people in Yugoslavia and abroad as possible. They portrayed their protest as a struggle between backward and conservative forces in the form of Milosević and themselves, the modern and liberal people. To sustain that argument, they linked the backward and conservative opponent to the historical presence of a clan-based social organisation (Mujanović 2018, 133-134). In their framing, they omitted the gap between the clan-based system that once existed in some parts and the time of their own struggle. By doing so, they involuntarily reproduced a Balkanist essentialist vision. This sort of

society, personified by Milosević, they proclaimed, is something that should belong in the dustbin of history. While the civic resistance movement took the image of clan-based organisation as a negative term, the ally of Milosević in Montenegro at the time, Bulatović, started to discursively resurrect the tribes in order to fight the separatism movement that was crystallising behind Milo Đukanović (Morrison 2009b, 175). Both sides used the image, one to portray its opponent as backward, the other to show traditionality. The discursive element of a clan-based organisation can be instrumentalised for either purpose. Đukanović and the other separatist forces in Montenegro again took that image and aimed to present the modern, pro-European force vis-à-vis the unionists from the late 90s, when it became clear that this line of argument fell on fertile ground in the population.

In the vision of the protest movement *Odupri Se*, Milo Đukanović can be seen as a symptom for a state-wide misery that lasted ever since the 90s. Many of my interview partners see the independence in 2006 critically now, as the elite was able to privatise public companies to the benefit of their own pockets even easier than in the turbulent 90s and get away with it. The fashion in which this elite is framed is fascinating. The families of the powerful people in the spotlight have gotten a good piece of the cake, quite publicly. These family relationships are discursively transformed into a clan-based organisation. The relationships of powerful elite get kinned in the conception of the protest movement, who then can make out a clan ruling over the country. This image of clan-based organisation automatically speaks against a European model of equality in Montenegro that these protesters strive for. The negative image this idea of clan has can be compared to the idea of organised crime in Montenegro; the Montenegrin mafia is divided into clans and comprises allegedly some of the major criminal organisations in Europe (URL 18). Klaus Buchenau, who researches organised crime compares the idea of corruption and the one of organised crime in that they both are present in countries of Western and Central Europe as well, but are more likely to be projected onto countries of Southeastern and Eastern Europe through mental mapping (Buchenau 2011, 260).

At this point of the discussion, the thesis has come full circle; as from the individual stance up until the highest level of hierarchy, an embarrassment runs through. May it be that you cannot get a job without connections or the number of the corruption indices served with the narratives of the big corruption actors; it is shared knowledge that is embarrassing and yet unifying. The protesters, in the 2000s as in 2019, even though they are against the power

holders, reproduce the balkanist stereotypes of the backward and underdeveloped. In their struggle, they represent a liberal, progressive stance. But this stance is authorised only by foreign powers, in the examples here this foreign power was mostly the EU. This cultural authority is not questioned until very late in the struggle, because compared to the current power holders, it is a small price to pay. The main notion to understand in this scenario is the soft power that is exercised by supranational institutions (Herzfeld 2016, 57). This power has to be seen as an extrapolation of colonial domination. The paternalistic stance of the EU towards Montenegro comes to light in the usage of metaphors used by politicians (Petrović 2015, 119) and in the dry reports that repeat the same phrases over the years like a mantra (EU reports 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020).

It would be incorrect to argue that the situation concerning informal networks and corruption in Montenegro is not all that bad; my interview partners all told me the opposite. Their judgement, however, may be distorted. Distorted by images and stereotypes that get reproduced over and over again, by fellow Montenegrins and by foreign actors. It is these stereotypes and images that prove to be embarrassing for my interview partners. Yet these sources of bad identification could have contributed to the creating of a Montenegrin identity.

5.8.3. Montenegro and the EU

One of the troublesome chapters of the accession process is the one that deals with corruption and rule of law. Corruption, as described above, can hardly be a good indicator for malfunction of a state, as it is more self-fulfilling prophecy than it is a reliable source of assessment. The corruption indices indeed tell us more of the self-conception of the citizens, as it is their perception that is measured in the surveys (Herzfeld 2018: 49). And this self-conception is shaped heavily by the comparison to a supposedly much better state. The European Union, by its self-conception, is a union where perfect states work together and share the same values. Every country that is not part of the union and applies for membership, like Montenegro, is scrutinised thoroughly and over a long period of time. Essentialist notions such as the described clan-system and prejudices of the region all shape the unbalanced basis for negotiations. Corruption, that also demonstrates qualities as a prejudice, forms the discourse as well. While as an academic, these essentialist ideas have no room in social theory, their pervasiveness in social life is undisputed. These notions, and this thesis highlights corruption as one, are spread in discourses and narratives and shape and construct a reality (Herzfeld

2016, 32). The power over the discourse of corruption in Montenegro lies not so much in a sole hand but is restrained by the geopolitical agenda of actors as the EU, Russia and others that share interest in the region for any reason. The EU is emphasised in this thesis because I argue that the accession process has transformed Montenegro in a petitioner with little negotiation room left (ibid, 22).

The property of temporality of corruption is needed to explain the workings of this discourse. One of the reasons those young people leave their country is connected to the idea corruption as an eternal flaw of their country. The situation now is not liveable and because corruption as a concept is tied to the group character, the situation maybe never really was, in the eyes of the leaving. The wrongdoings of any politician might be the symptom, but the disorder of the system could be thought of as everlasting. This perception of corruption or the corrupt character of a system is woven into the narratives over time (Thelen and Alber 2018, 24). Established first by narratives of others and foreign powers to portray Montenegro, or the region for that matter, as a backward country with little prospects of modernising itself as a coequal nation as the others portrayed themselves.

While this happened in the epoch of the establishment of nation states in the 19th century, the concurrent large powers as the EU walks in the footsteps of these narratives. And because these narratives are tied to the concept of nation, the narratives themselves are also located in a distant past, outside the range of contestation. The temporality aspect then merges the ascribed national characteristics, maybe even thought of as essentialist, with the wrongdoings of individual people in the present. This pattern of explanation works insofar as it is a self-reinforcing argument that cannot be disproved easily. As pointed out in the chapter that dealt with corruption, the concept is unsuitable as an etic term, as the measurement is difficult if not impossible and there is always corruption off the radar. The argument above with its aspect of temporality speaks to the emic interpretation of corruption. Corruption becomes more of a prejudice that is ascribed to anything if the need for a quick explanation arises.

The idea of pollution of the collective is ubiquitous in the story of young people that plan to leave the country or have already left it. Politicians as perpetrators of corruption are depicted as a greedy unitary mass that spills onto the collective with their dirty morals and their self-interest. Again, this is a simplistic image of a large populace, but it establishes a clear rhetorical distance to these self-interested individuals and in doing so, the storytellers climb a moral high

ground (Herzfeld 2018, 46-47). The politicians, or elites, or any accomplice of the informal machinery of the ones in power are individuals who threaten the integrity of the collective and are the ones who are blamed (Thelen and Alber 2018, 18). In the same vein, my interview partners acknowledged the usage of informal mechanisms or corruption by common people not part of any of these groups. With slight traces of uncomfortableness, they absolved the common people who are using the same dirty techniques as the self-interested politicians; either on the ground of need of the individual or of the necessities of the group of close kin (Herzfeld 2018, 46).

5.8.4. Corruption and the Institutions

As seen above, corruption and informality in some ways constitute a perceptive conjuncture between the individual level and the state. The institutions are the tangible parts of the state, because there a people who act on behalf of the state. To my interview partners it was clear that these bureaucrats working in the institutions are not role-fulfilling, infallible individuals; quite the contrary, in the view of my interview partners, holding an appointment in an institution was seen as constantly being exposed to the temptation of acting unlawfully and in self-interest. Their call for accountability is echoed in this. While there are rules to go by, and this is obvious to anyone, those rules are oftentimes circumvented without any consequences. If the judicial system is depicted as toothless and prosecutions against the *big shots* tend to peter out, it is lead back to the enmeshment of most people in an all-encompassing informal network.

This informal network may have preceded the formal institutions in many ways and because the new formal institutions following the independence of Montenegro have lost a lot of their trust after initial hopefulness, the reliance upon informal networks has the same conceptual basis as the confidence people express towards the civic sector; a sector that can ultimately be seen as institutional outside the official institutions. The question for people becomes rather what quasi-institutionalised informal network is the best option. Either way, the *other* people are seen as an estranged group; in my case this can be a supposed party army that is predominant in the large public administration and acts as a vote machine in the eyes of my interview partners. The most powerful of these informal circles that equip official offices are seen as the elite; the large portion of this so-called party army is still pardoned on grounds of their attested impasse. Rajković (2018, 140f) portrayed a similar situation in Serbia, although

on the local level. The second group in my example has to be the people working for the third sector, in NGOs and civic organisations and the activists that spurred my interest in the topic in the first place. From the perspective of power holders, they pose a threat to the status quo and have a functioning and strong informal network as well; they are by no means immune to allegations of corruption and informal ties used in a similar way. The resources that are controlled by that latter group are certainly fewer. The interesting aspect then is the justification again, because as the resources are not abundantly available, the necessity argument comes in handy again. The financial structure of NGOs is often the weak spot of these organisations, as foreign donors like the EU contribute generously to the work of the third sector. As indicated earlier, extreme partisanship and patronage are constantly the topic in politics and are thus normalised to some extent. It is for this reason that the third sector is not above suspicion, according to the empirical data I gathered. This does not mean the political process in Montenegro is corrupted per se, but it suggests an image problem of politics and makes political apathy comprehensible.

The problematic image of the political life in Montenegro is not monocausal. But the malfunctions are discursively put into plain sight by corruption and an informal way of getting things done. As imperfect as it may seem to my interview partners, at the end of the day, the structure works, even though it exhibits a stark inequality along boundaries of affiliation. Corruption catches the eye and is the dominant flaw in the discourse about institutions. It is used as a explanation why certain mechanisms do not work properly (Herzfeld 2018, 41). From the discourse about malfunctions of the state and corruption one thing with significance has to be taken away and has to be considered, before the thesis sets foot on the geopolitical, international level, namely the impossibility of perfection. Herzfeld argues that while the state has high ideals, the social experience on the ground contests the vision of a pure and perfect state. Instead, imperfection is the reality, and together with people's coping mechanisms, these imperfect structures can be seen as utterly authentic (Herzfeld 2015, 535). This authenticity arises from the everyday situation where wrongdoings to a certain degree of other citizens and the state are expected and sometimes even accepted. In addition, this authenticity, the lived experience of the structures without constantly thinking about them, is gained through socialisation and indeed indicates a shared, intimate, and cultural knowledge between different levels and across classes (ibid, 540).

6. CONCLUSION

In my research I used the concept of corruption to give an account of the importance of informal mechanisms within a state. For my interview partners, the concept serves as model for things in the political system that are unjust and problematic for them. It is at the same time a key for making sense of that same political system. Following Herzfeld and his theory of cultural intimacy, I argue that the secret and intimate knowledge about corruption and other informal mechanisms my interview partners share contribute to the Montenegrin identity as well. Identity in that case works through negative identification. The perception of corruption among my interview partners was the research question and starting point of the research process. Activists of the *Odupri Se* movement and people that are employed in the civil society sector were the groups I focused on and conducted interviews with for this thesis.

My interview partners described to me a situation where the informal aspect of formal institutions affects their lives and the political situation in their country in a very decisive fashion. In their descriptions, corruption and other informal mechanisms are interchangeably used. Whether it was the needed ties to get a good job in the public sector, the better and faster service of bureaucratic offices, or the gauntlet one must endure if one stands in opposition to the powerful, the anecdotes of my interview partners show an intimate understanding of the workings of their system. For different aspects of corruption, either a story they personally experienced or a story someone found worthy of sharing introduced me to this intimate understanding. The literature on Montenegro in recent years and on post-socialist countries in general support the view of my interview partners to a large extent. My thesis adds to the literature the anecdotal narrative snippets that illuminate a larger hegemonic order.

When Yason Jung did her research on Bulgaria, the groups she worked with were civic activists and civil society employees as well (Jung 2010). What distinguishes the research setup is the stage of accession to the European Union. In Jung's example, Bulgaria has just become a member state of the EU. In my research, the accession is not yet completed, with Montenegro still being in the middle of the negotiations and having just opened all the necessary chapters. The relevance of my thesis stems from the determining cultural changes that come with joining larger political units. Not only the necessary policies to close all chapters need to be negotiated. More importantly, for my research, is the intangible agreement on the position of

the future EU country within the EU. Currently, like other countries that seek to join the *House of Europe*, to use one of the widely used metaphors, Montenegro gets treated paternalistic by the EU. With Bulgaria as the example, it is not certain that this attitude will change upon accession. That is to say that there are countries inside the EU that are still treated like they need to work harder, to become worthy like the *older* member states (Petrović 2015, 110).

This image of Montenegro that allows the EU to be paternalistic, comes in part from the *Balkanism* discourse Maria Todorova first wrote about in her work in the late 1990s. Images of Montenegro as backwards and essentially different than other European countries base on stereotypical attributions to justify geopolitical efforts (Todorova 2009). Not unlike the European countries used those attributions to vindicate their territorial claims after the Ottoman Empire lost control over Southeastern Europe in the 19th century, I argue, the EU uses some of the same attributions to enhance its position in the negotiations that started over a decade ago. This soft power the EU exerts in this way is reproduced by the stories of my interview partners. Corruption, for them, is often rooted in the pre-modern times in their country, when a clan-based organisation was in place in some parts. The corruption today is seen widely as a remnant of that time. Corruption is considered as something backward, un-modern that should belong to another time but is still damaging their country today. In this equation, they project the image of backwardness to today's Montenegro, and thus are contributing to the reproduction of that image.

The deep understanding and the intimate knowledge my interview partners have about the political situation allowed them to find ways to cope with the situation. In the interviews, examples of the strategies avoidance, confrontation and arrangement were discussed. Before a strategy is chosen, however, group boundaries have to be set. The cultural intimacy my interview partners demonstrated throughout the interviews, served to establish these boundaries. This is especially important when someone uses arrangement as a strategy. Arrangement, for example using one's connection to get into public offices, even though other people are better qualified, is seen as fundamentally morally wrong behaviour by my interview partners. If the own group is presented as disadvantaged, however, the person doing morally wrong acts is rehabilitated on the grounds of necessity. The group boundaries are very blurry, and the classification is often drawn on kinship connections. Embarrassment in talking about the corruption scandals of the past and present pointed to another, larger group that cultural intimacy sets the boundaries for. One is part of the small group where moral wrongdoings are

justified, but through embarrassment, one also shows belonging to the larger group. Here, corruption, by the feeling of embarrassment, contributes to identity-building of the whole political system, namely Montenegro.

6.1. Outlook

This thesis argues that corruption does not have much analytical potency when it is applied as an etic term. Instead, it stands for the usage of corruption as an emic concept that has the ability to alter politics in the long run. By understanding informal mechanisms like corruption as imperative part of formal institutions and the whole political system, rather than pointing a finger to the malfunction, it should allow us to equip institutions in a way that corruption and other informal mechanisms are not needed. There always is an informal side that cannot be controlled, but by creating a framework where this informal side is better monitored, people will feel treated more equally, and that should be the goal of politics.

The research project ends after this thesis. The situation in Montenegro and its EU accession that is approximating and will probably happen within the next ten years, ensure for the topic to be of further relevance. The transition from non-EU country to EU country and the changes in the civil society sector that go along with that transition would be a fascinating research topic where many lessons about the EU and its handling of *new* member states, its cultural authority and the civil sector of the respective new states can be learned.

7. APPENDIX

7.1. Academic Sources

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7.2. Interview Transcripts[13]

T1: Interview transcript Anja and Lazar, interview conducted: 04.09.2019

T2: Interview transcript Jana, interview conducted: 29.08.2019

T3: Interview transcript David, interview conducted: 26.08.2019

T4: Interview transcript Maja, interview conducted: 13.08.2019

T5: Interview transcript Matija, interview conducted: 27.08.2019

T6: Interview transcript Milo, interview conducted: 29.08.2019

T7: Interview transcript Vlado, interview conducted: 27.08.2019

T8: Interview transcript Bogdan, interview conducted: 28.08.2019

T9: Interview transcript Luka, interview conducted: 05.09.2019

T10: Interview transcript Emina, interview conducted: 08.08.2019

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[13] The names of my interview partners have benn changed.

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URL 2 https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/15/montenegro-rally-to-demand-corrupt-leaders-resignations/
URL 3 https://balkaninsight.com/2019/01/25/envelope-affair-raises-suspicion-over-montenegrin-party-funds-01-24-2019/
URL 4 https://www.total-montenegro-news.com/politics/3646-protest-continues-odupri-se-movement-biggest-in-montenegrin-history
URL 5 https://twitter.com/nicosemsrott/status/385397446806732800
URL 6 https://www.rferl.org/a/tobacco-crazy-montenegro-bans-smoking-in-public-indoor-spaces/30109717.html
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URL 8: https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/12/faces-from-montenegros-church-protests/
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7.5. Abstract

The thesis deals with perception of corruption among civil activists and people that are employed in the civil society sector in Montenegro. An ethnographic research was conducted in 2019 to show how corruption as a concept helps people to make sense of the political system they live in. At the time of the research, a large corruption scandal has triggered the anti-government protest movement *Odupri Se* The concept of corruption and its roots are intertwined for the interviewees with earlier epochs in the Montenegrin history and thereby given a backward character vis-à-vis the modern state devoid of corruption. By using Michael Herzfeld's theory of cultural intimacy, the perception can be analysed to show a greater hegemonic order is inherent in the perceptions the interviewees have. Because Montenegro has been in negotiations for accessing the European Union for more than a decade now, attributes like backwardness are ascribed to the country to heighten the EU's position for negotiations.

Die Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Wahrnehmung von Korruption unter zivilgesellschaftlichen AktivistInnen und Menschen, die im zivilgesellschaftlichen Sektor in Montenegro beschäftigt sind. Im Jahr 2019 wurde eine ethnografische Untersuchung durchgeführt, um zu zeigen, wie Korruption als Konzept Menschen hilft, sich in ihrem politischen System zurechtzufinden. Zum Zeitpunkt der Forschung bewegte ein grosser Korruptionsskandal viele Menschen zur Teilnahme an der regierungskritischen Protestbewegung *Odupri Se*. Der Ursprung der heutigen Korruption wurde von den InterviewteilnehmerInnen in frühere Epochen der montenegrinischen Geschichte gestellt, wodurch Korruption einen rückständigen Charakter erhält. Mit Michael Herzfelds Theorie der kulturellen Intimität kann die Wahrnehmung in einer Weise analysiert und kontextualisiert werden, um eine größere hegemoniale Ordnung zu erkennen. Da sich Montenegro seit mehr als einem Jahrzehnt in den Beitrittsverhandlungen zur zur Europäischen Union befindet, werden dem Land Attribute wie Rückständigkeit zugeschrieben, um die Verhandlungsposition der EU zu stärken.