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IS CORRUPTION UNDERSTOOD DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT CULTURES?

Anthropology meets Political Science

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate how ideas and socio-cultural preferences of "public" versus "private" account for the presence of bribery and corruption practices. Understanding corruption in terms of the differences that cultures attribute to what should be seen as private or public goods can provide new and unexpected implications not only for a general theory on this phenomenon, but more significantly for its high degree of variation among societies. The methodology chosen for this paper is based on a quantitative analysis of ethnographic data from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) that explores the relation between types of economic subsistence and cases in which issues of bribery are found. The variation in how bribery is understood in different cultures does not relate to different moral understandings of the problem of corruption, but to how different societies value the difference, convertibility or blurring of goods belonging to the public and private spheres.

Keywords: corruption, indigenous cultures, public good, anthropology, bribery, economic systems

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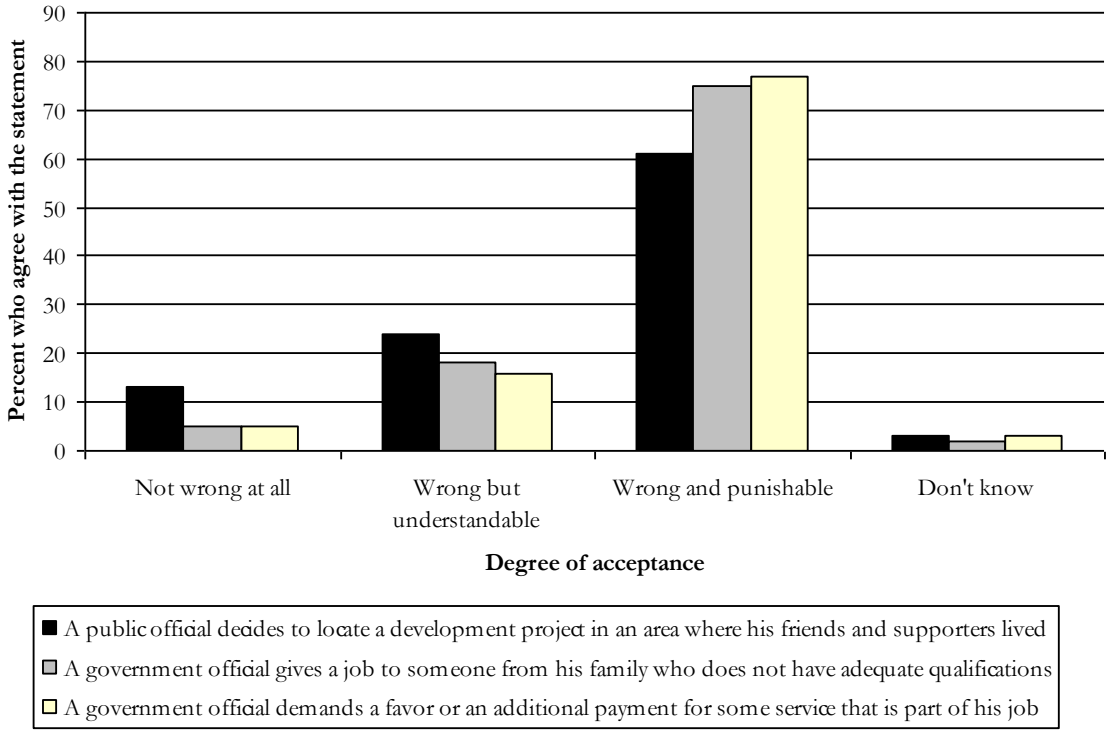
Corruption and Culture

Quality of Government and its close cousins Good Governance and State Capacity are relatively new concepts that have made a strong impact in some of the highest policy circles since the mid-1990s. The three concepts have received most attention in circles dealing with developing countries and the so called transition countries (Smith 2007). Especially *good governance* is now used by many national development agencies and international organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. An example is the International Monetary Fund that in 1996 declared that "promoting good governance in all its aspects, including by ensuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption, as essential elements of a framework within which economies can prosper" (IMF 2008). Although these concepts refer to somewhat different things, they all share a focus on corruption and the need for developing countries and not only to lower their levels of corruption. This represents a major shift in focus of what is causing the lack of economic growth and social progress in poor countries. Before the mid-1990s, corruption and other aspects of the quality of government was seldom talked about (Rothstein 2011). The situation is now very different and since the late 1990s, one can now speak of the existence of an international "good governance and anti-corruption regime" (Mungiu-Pippidi 2011).

The development of this international anti-corruption regime has not been without its critiques. One point that has been stressed in this critique is that the international anti-corruption agenda represents a specific western liberal ideal that is not easily applicable to countries outside that part of the world (Heidenheimer 2002, Bukovansky 2006). There are at least two arguments against this type of relativistic conceptual framework. The first is normative and based on the similar discussion in the areas of human rights and democracy. First, the right not to be discriminated by public authorities, the right not to have to pay bribes for what should be free public services and the right to get treat with "equal concern and respect" from the courts are in fact not very distant for what counts as universal human rights. The second reason against a relativistic definition of corruption is empirical. Although the empirical research in this area is not entirely unambiguous, most of it points to the quite surprising result that people in very different cultures seem to have a very similar notion of what should count as corruption. Survey results from regions in India and in Sub-Saharan Africa show that people in these societies take a very clear stand against corruption and understands the problem in the same manner as it is understood by for example organizations such as the World Bank and Transparency International (Afrobaromter 2006, Widmalm 2005, 2008, see

also Miller, Grødeland, and Koshechkina 2001 as well as Nichols, Siedel, and Kasdin 204;). For example, when asked by the Afrobarometer (2006) survey whether they consider it "not wrong at all," "wrong but understandable," or "wrong and punishable" if a public official: 1) decides to locate a development project in an area where his friends and supporters live; 2) gives a job to someone from his family who does not have adequate qualifications, and; 3) demands a favor or an additional payment for some service that is part of his job, a clear majority of respondents in countries severely hit by corruption such as Kenya and Uganda deemed all three acts both wrong and punishable (see figure 1 below).

FIGURE 1, (MORAL APPROVAL OF CORRUPTION)



Source: (Afrobarometer 2006)

As can be seen, it is only a small minority if the respondents who find that such acts "not wrong at all" and the group that finds them "wrong but understandable" is also small. Widmalm (2005, 2008) finds similar results in a survey study of villages in India. Although, in reality an absent figure in these villages, Widmalm finds that the Weberian civil servant model (impartial treatment of citizens disregarding income, status, class, caste, gender, and religion), has a surprisingly large support

among the village population. In other words, the idea put forward by among others Heidenheimer (2002) that the public acceptance of what is commonly understood as corruption varies significantly across cultures does not necessarily find support here.

The reason why people, although condemning corruption, participate in corrupt practices seem to be that they understand the situation as a "collective action" problem where it makes little sense to be "the only one" that refrains from using or accepting bribes and other kick-backs (Karklins 2005, Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2012). As Gunnar Myrdal stated in his analysis of the "soft state" problem in developing countries already in the 1960s,"Well, if everybody seems corrupt, why shouldn't I be corrupt" (Myrdal 1968:409). In his anthropological study of corruption in Nigeria, Jordan Smith (2007:65) concludes that "although Nigerians recognize and condemn, in the abstract, the system of patronage that dominates the allocation of government resources, in practice people feel locked in". It makes little sense to be the only honest policeman in a severely corrupt police force, or the only one in the village who does not pay the doctor under the table to get ones children immunized if everyone else pays (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell 2012).
In his classic study of clientelism and particularism in southern Italy, Banfield (1958) found that it made perfect sense to all the family in the village of Montegranesi to be amoral familists since everyone was expected to be or eventually to perform according to this social template (Banfield 1958). The spatial universalism of corruption increases theoretical depth when considering that even temporal approaches to this phenomenon have provided similar conclusions. Analyses of what counted as corruption in very distant pasts, such as the Roman Empire or thirteen century France, give the impression of not being different from contemporary notions of the concept (MacMullen 1988, Jordan 2009).

Another set of important empirical results that questions the relativistic position comes from recent comparisons of results from expert surveys and surveys of representative samples of citizens. The first thing to note is that various expert-based surveys and estimations for measuring corruption and other theoretically related concepts of "good governance" such as the rule-of-law and the extent to which impartiality is the basic norm for the civil service in different countries, correlate at a surprisingly high level (Holmberg, Rothstein & Nasiritousi 2009, Rothstein & Teorell 2012). Even more interesting is that the expert-based measures of the level of corruption in various countries and measures based on representative samples of the population correlate strongly. One example is a recent study by Svallfors (2012) who uses the European Social Survey carried out in 2008 that

covers 29 countries in both western and Eastern Europe. This survey had questions such as if people perceived that the police or the public health care gave "special advantages to certain people or deal with everyone equally?" Svallfors compared the answers to questions like this from the sample populations in the 29 countries with three different expert-based measures: the International Country Risk Guide indicator of Quality of Government, the Transparency International Corruption Index and the World Bank Estimate of Government Efficiency. His conclusion is the following: "we find amazingly strong correlations between the experts' judgments and the public's perceptions. The correlation coefficient is no less than 0.81, which indicates that the measures are very strongly interrelated". This strongly suggests that perception of corruption correlates with perception of good government, and by extension that judgment on the quality of the political and administrative institutions are not seen as a particularistic product.

Another similar comparison has been done by Bechert and Quandt based on the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). In its 2006 survey, the ISSP for the first time included questions that would measure the extent of perceptions of corruption. Comparing the results from 35 countries, including not only the West but also the countries in Eastern Europe. Africa, Asia and South America, with Transparency Internationals expert based measure of corruption, they conclude: "The two measurement tools of corruption, one based on expert interviews, the other on probability samples, reveal astonishingly similar results" (Bechert & Quandt 2009:100). Yet another recent survey of corruption carried out by the QoG Institute on behalf of the EU commission reveals the same pattern. This study consisted of interviews with 34000 persons in 27 EU countries and has question to not only capture perceptions but also direct experiences of corruption. Again, the correlation between results about the level of corruption in various EU countries from the survey of "ordinary people" and expert based measures are surprisingly similar with a statistical correlation at .81 (Charron, Lapuente & Rothstein 2011). The conclusion from these results are that "ordinary people" in both high and low corrupt countries have the same perceptions and also experience the same level of corruption as the international country experts. In sum, there are both empirical and normative arguments speaking in favor of a universal definition of corruption.

The public goods approach

One way to understand why there seems to exist a universal understanding of what should count as corruption despite its enormous variation both in types, frequency and location, is what we would call a *public goods approach* to this problem. In all societies/cultures, in order to survive, all groups of people have had to produce at least a minimal set of public goods such as security measures, a basic infrastructure or organized/collective forms for the provision of food. As Fukuyama (2011:29ff) has argued, the very idea that we as humans started out as atoms in a state of nature and then decided to rationally accept a "social contract" is highly misleading. On the other hand, Malkin and Wildavsky (1991) developed the proposition that public goods are public only because it is the society that makes them so to some particular aim (see also Mansfield 1980; Douglas 1989). In our view this approach is feeding relativism over ideas of quality of government or good government. In this paper we are less interested to explore the significance of the public-private divide for societies than to investigate how the socio-cultural creation of ideas of "public" versus "private" accounts for the presence of bribery and corruption practices.

The very nature of a good being "public" is that it is to be managed and distributed according to a principle that is very different from that of private goods. When this principle for the management and distribution of public goods is broken by those entrusted with the responsibility for handling the public goods, the ones that are victimized see this as corruption. This is why corruption is a concept that is related to the political and not the private sphere. Much of the confusion about cultural relativism in the discussion about what should count as corruption stems from the issue that what should count as "public goods" differ between different societies and cultures. For example, in an absolutist feudal country where the understanding may be that the central state apparatus is the private property of the lord/king, this state is not seen as a public good. In many indigenous societies with pre-state political systems, local communities have usually produced some forms of public goods, for example for taking care of what Elinor Ostrom (1990) defined as "common pool resources" which are natural resources that are used by members of the group but that risks depletion if overused. Such resources is constantly faced a "tragedy of the commons" problem and is thus in need of public goods in the form of effective regulations to prevent overuse leading to depletion. Our argument departs from the idea that it is difficult to envision a society without some public goods. The point is that when these public goods are handled or converted into private goods this is universally understood as corruption independently of the culture. A sec-

ond conclusion is thus that we should not expect, for instance indigenous people to have a moral or ethical understanding corrupt practice that differs from for example what is the dominant view in western organizations like Transparency International and the World Bank or as it is stated in the UN convention against corruption. Instead, what may differ is what is seen as falling under the public goods category. An example could be that even in the case in which there is not a system for taxation, still there are certain individuals that have been selected to perform functions as arbitrators or judges. This is a public good because it makes it possible to solve disputes between village members/families in a non-violent way. These arbitrators may, in several cases, receive gifts from the parties involved for their services. Such gifts may for a westerner look like bribes, but they are usually not seen as bribes by the local people, who make a functional distinction between bribes and gifts (Sneath 2006; Werner 2000). The reasons for why they are not seen as bribes by the local villagers is that: a) the gifts are publicly given, and b) there is a culturally defined level for how big such gift can be. This implies that the gift is to be seen as a fee for a service, not a bribe. It would only be a bribe, and would also by the local people be seen as a bribe, if it was given in a way to influence adjudication by favoring one party over another. In this case the public good is converted into a private one, and this is perceived as corruption.

Understanding corruption in this public goods approach can thus serve as a solution to the relativism – universalism puzzle that has plagued discussions about this problem for a long time, especially in the lights of anthropological reservations on applying the dichotomies public-private, moral-immoral.

The anthropological approaches to corruption

Anthropologists have not yet taken a decisive and single position towards the ethnographic study of corruption. Roughly speaking there are two main standpoints. The first is of engagement with the topic, the second is of suspicion towards it (Smith 2007:9ff; Zinn 2005). Concerning the first, there has been since the 1990s a stream of ethnographical research that has dealt, directly or not, expressively or not, with corruption. This research has been mostly focusing on postcolonial and post-socialist states, with some notable exceptions (Pardo 2004; Rivkin-Fish 2004), not because anthropology has aimed to essentialize the phenomenon by ascribing it to the domain of institutional restructuring, aid-receiving economies and post-totalitarian governments. Rather, this regional bias depends on the fact that anthropologists have more commonly conducted ethnographic fieldwork in these regions rather than in western countries. Moreover, among these approaches, there is not

such a thing as a common theoretical framework or modeling, but a complex web of arguments, approaches and insights that sometimes intertwine or overlap one another, but mostly show a high degree of particularism (Torsello 2011). Therefore, to a non-anthropologist, the results of ethnographic approaches to corruption, may apparently seem rather relativistic and poorly helpful for theoretical and policy aims.

The second, and most common position among anthropologists towards the study of corruption is one of suspicion or simply detachment (Harris 2002). A simple proof to this statement comes from the reality that over the last two decades the number of panels on corruption in major anthropological societies' conferences can be counted on a single hand. Not better is the case of volume publications in anthropology that deals expressively with corruption, amounting over the last four decades to less than a dozen. There are different explanations to this shortcoming. Here it is sufficient to refer to two of them. First, corruption is a complex phenomenon which, in everyday practices, is inextricably tied with numerous other forms of social interaction, such as, for instance: gift, reciprocity, friendship, kin ties, patronage, identity, affection and even love. Anthropologists, who have been traditional engaging through ethnographic research with most of these themes in societies, might have discovered corruption more by chance than by directly looking for it among these themes. Moreover, an ethnographic research focus on corruption per se brings about a number of epistemic questions concerning the authority of the ethnographer, her taking a moral standpoint in judging about the observed practices and their moral, and the confrontation between the ethnographer and the studied socio-cultural differences. All these arehighly problematic issues that have in recent times been challenged by those scholars advocating the reflexive turn in anthropology (Faubion and Marcus 2009)

Secondly, the way ethnographic research is conducted, through direct interaction with the observed community, opens up a number of questions and dilemmas about the ethical conduct of the researcher. As stated in one anthropological study of corruption: "Anthropology's emphasis on local rationalities and cultural logics, and the largely sympathetic sensibility of anthropologists regarding their subjects, may produce a disinclination to attach a seemingly derogatory Western label like corruption to the behavior of non-Western people" (Smith 2007:10, cf. Shore and Haller 2005:7). Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, writing about corruption as an observed practice, or simply as opinion about a diffuse practice may significantly expose informants. The outcome is that ethnographers' accounts seem to disappoint the expectations of those who would like to read first-

hand local encounters with corruption. This hesitation to describe squarely what is taking place on the field is what makes the ethnographic approach to corruption a somewhat hermetic one, but nonetheless potentially innovative.

This paper stems from the idea that ethnographic knowledge has an intrinsic strong and often hidden potential to disentangle the social and cultural complexity of corruption, in particular concerning the universalism-particularism puzzle. To this aim, we aim to demonstrate, taking the example of indigenous cultures studied by anthropologists, that one of the main reasons why universalism and particularism persist in this phenomenon is that what are seen as private and public goods has a high degree of variation among different cultures. Our argument is that it is this variation, and not the moral understanding of corruption as such, that creates an imbalance in what we understand as corruption in different cultures. In other words, when a good that is perceived as a public good is used in a culture as a private good this action is condemned as a moral wrong. The variation in what is understood as corruption lies in the variation in what counts as (and the extension of) public goods in the cultures, and not in a variation if it is morally wrong to turn a public goods into a private good. Hence, our hypothesis is that in a culture in which the private and public goods are neatly separated both conceptually and customarily, i.e. in their access and management, will have less fear of corruption. On the other hand, corruption will be a relevant issue whenever the private and public goods overlap or are easily converted by those who have access to them.

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this paper is based on a quantitative analyses of ethnographic data from a unique source, namely the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF). This is the single most comprehensive and largest ethnographic dataset of world indigenous cultures. The HRAF database has been compiled by Yale University and it has been developed and updated since 1949. It includes data on 258 indigenous cultures and an overall of over 600,000 pages worth of ethnographic descriptions by professional anthropologists, (and in minor parts by archaeologists and historians). The cultures covered are divided among 8 world regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle America and the Caribbean, Middle East, North America, Oceania and South America) and these are further divided in a number of sub-regions. The complex and recently much improved searchable indexing system of HRAF allows researchers to obtain detailed, qualitative ethnographic information on a single culture, as well as analyzing keywords cross-culturally. Ethnographic files are present in the form of full-text citations as paragraphs dealing with a specific theme, which are comparatively

arranged through sub-themes or related topics depending on their relevance in the ethnographies in which they appear.

Another important feature of HRAF is that it maps indigenous cultures according to a classification of major forms of subsistence and types of economic activity. The standard nine such forms are as follow:

Foragers: cultures that depend for subsistence at least 85% on hunting, fishing and gathering
Foragers/food producers: depend 56% or more on hunting, fishing and gathering, but also produce food
Pastoralists: depend 56% or more on herding and animal husbandry
Horticulturalists: depend 56% or more on simple agriculture (extensive or horticulture)
Intensive agriculturalists: depend 56% or more on intensive, irrigated agriculture
Pastoral/agriculturalists: where pastoralism and agriculture/horticulture provide 76% or more of the economic activity
Other: including other combinations of the above
Commercial economy: gaining from wages, business or selling products
Not assigned: information is missing or controversial

For the purpose of this article we decided to select four categories of subsistence forms: *foragers* (including both foragers and foragers/food producers), *pastoralists* and *horticulturalists*. For the fourth, we created a "dummy" category that includes all the economic forms above (excluding "not assigned") based on agriculture and commercial economy. This choice is grounded on the idea that we want to test differences between cultures which mainly produce for their own subsistence versus cultures which mainly produce for market based exchange or other commercial purposes. This difference has been shown to be very relevant for other types of economic behavior exposed in experimental research carried out in a collaborative project between anthropologists and economists (Henrich et. al. 2005, Henrich et al 2010)

Our choice of dealing with various indigenous cultures has some shortcomings and some advantages. Concerning the minuses, the sample of cultures divided among forms of economic activity is not balanced. For example, foragers are the least represented subsistence type among the three in the HRAF database. This implies that we in particular cases have to rely on very small numbers within the overall HRAF sample. Moreover, the type of data which makes up HRAF are mostly

qualitative, hence our task has been to code forms in which anthropologists have described corruption-related ideas and practices. There will be an obvious bias towards the personal judgment of the ethnographer who provided the data and who might have used a word or analyzed a practice in a context in which local people would have given to that a different interpretation, as it is normally confronted with in ethnographic research (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The benefits of this methodology are first of all the unique opportunity to investigate corruption in some societies that, at the time of the ethnographic researches, were still partially insulated from the effects of globalization, mass-consumption and industrialization. This is particularly true for those groups which perform a prevalently subsistence type of economy (foragers, horticulturalists and to a lesser extent pastoralists). Secondly, most of these societies present much higher degrees of social homogeneity than any sample of cross-cultural world survey may claim to reach. Thirdly, since we have assumed that corruption is a universal phenomenon (because it is the product of a wrongly positioned or assumed balanced between public and private goods), there is no reason to suppose that any indigenous culture should not recognize this phenomenon. Instead, investigation in their social realities can provide a significant contribution to a deeper understanding of the particularism versus universalism puzzle in corruption research.

Bribery across indigenous cultures

In spite of the numerous potential application of HRAF database, and in spite of the volume of scholarly works that use its data, this is, as far as we know, the first attempt ever to quantitatively analyze indigenous cultures in the field of corruption. In what follows we shall, first, define the context in which corruption has been searched over the files. Secondly, we shall map quantitatively corruption that is found through the keyword "bribe" across world regions and economic systems and detect the dominant trends. Third, we shall apply these trends to the differences in subsistence and economic activity types.

In the HRAF files, bribery and corruption are present in five items: evasion of justice[1] (code number: 696), offense against the state[2] (687), exploitation by political office holders[3] (661), political

[1] Defined in HRAF as: "Manner in which judgments and sentences are executed (e.g., self-help, execution by special officials); enforcement of contracts and debts; writs (e.g., of execution, attachment, replevin); probation; evasions of justice (e.g., procedural loopholes, bribery, flight, asylum); etc".

intrigue[4] (662) and corruption as political machines[5] (667). Due to the complexity of the task of attributing corruption to the political spheres of governance and administration of the societies under investigations, a number of which do not have structured and centralized political state-like systems, we have decided to keep all these five denominations that account for corruption. This operation allows us to include several fields that, in common political theory, are not directly related to governance and corruption, but which in the ethnographic descriptions by anthropologists appear with the term "bribe". This rationale follows the idea that in different cultural, and particularly indigenous, settings while conceptions of a distinction between private and public goods exist, the factual division of them do not coincide with those of the Western or industrialized societies (Haller and Shore 2005, Nujiten and Anders 2007). Moreover, in order to optimize the search efficacy, instead of "corruption", we chose to use the keyword "bribe", which, fortunately, accounts for both its nominal and verbal form "bribery".

Bribery has different meanings in the analyzed files and the interpretation of these meanings, as well as of the fields to which they pertain, has been one of the aims of this research. Of course, there have been cases in which it was difficult to detect a singular semiotic of bribery, because the action or the opinion referred to multiple fields (e.g. judicial system and litigation settlements over property issues). In these cases, the main field has been indicated and other fields were added only if there was a clear multiple expression of the domain to which bribery pertained. The only case in which the word bribery was not taken into account was its general use as form of gift that induces a person to make a decision or perform an action without any clear benefit for the briber. Such cases have been classified as "other". On the other hand, there are cases in which bribery is found in

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2 "Definitions, incidence of, and punishments for political offenses (e.g., treason, espionage, illegal entry, conspiracy, lese majesty, electoral fraud, malfeasance in office); penalties for military offenses (e.g., insubordination, cowardice, desertion, mutiny); definitions of and punishments for judicial offenses (e.g., giving or receiving bribes, perjury, subornation, barratry, contempt of court); penalties for monetary or fiscal offenses (e.g., counterfeiting, falsification of records or documents, smuggling, tax evasion); etc".

3 "Exercise of their power by holders of political office to further personal goals, whether materialistic, psychological, or ideological; perquisites of office (e.g., exceptional income and material comforts, special sexual or marital privileges, unusual honors or deference); use of office for self-aggrandizement (e.g., exhibitionism, extortion of bribes, protection of vice, acceptance of commissions for services rendered); employment of power to force others to conform to personal, ethical, or religious convictions; suppression of rivals (e.g., purges); oppression of opponents; nepotism; protection of vested interests; etc".

4 "Use of the techniques of manipulative mobility to wrest favors from the holders of power or to obtain political preferment; flattery and ingratiation; use of bribery; deals; palace intrigue; opportunism; "playing politics";etc".

5 "Special organizations for the control of elections and offices and the distribution of spoils; personal and party machines; rewards to members and controlled voters (e.g., jobs, contracts, favors, police protection, petty graft); mechanisms of mobility within the machine (e.g., ward heeling, getting out the vote); relations with the underworld; extent of political corruption; attempts at reform; etc".

literary (tales, drama and dance), or in mythological texts. Here the field was added when the act of bribing expressively involved an asymmetric relationship such as between a master and client, a god and a worshipper, a god and a human being, particularly in the field "religion".

The following are the categories or fields of bribery which we coded after the HRAF advanced search, with the subcategories that they contain.

Judicial: including police and military
Local Administration: including elections, land allotments, taxation, opinions and media, foresters and postal services
Colonial domination: considered as external forms of administration
Infrastructures: includes education, health and transport
Gifts: includes debt
Marriage: relates to all transactions that accompany marriage links
Religion: includes all religious and magic practices with supernatural powers, as well as mythological figures
Interethnic Relations: expressively related to interethnic relations and migration
Private Sector: includes commercial transactions
Leisure: with art, culture and prostitution
Other: indefinable categories, usually when bribery does not mean any kind of social relation or transaction.

Private and public good in the economic activity types

Cultural anthropologists have developed an evolutionary model that draws a line among the interrelation of four key aspects in human society: ecological adaptation, forms of subsistence, demographic pressure and socio-political organizations (for a comprehensive review and trends of this approach see Johnson and Earle 2000). In this perspective, the three subsistence types considered above (foraging, horticulturalism and pastoralism) are the pristine forms of human subsistence out of which all other forms of economic activity eventually have evolved (see table 1 below). For the first, the activity of hunters-gatherers, it has been assumed that man has acted as forager for 96% of his existence on earth. For the historical origin of the other two there is more ambiguity in the literature. Apart from the evolutionary question whether man has domesticated plants or animals first, the problem is that there exists no single culture in which one of these two forms of domestication

have completely excluded the other. This explains why, if in the case of foragers an approximation of 85% of dedication to hunting and gathering is possible, horticulturalists and pastoralists societies never engage by more than 56% in their main subsistence activity. This consideration has some important implications for the public-private good argument. Anthropologists who have engaged with the "tragedy of the commons argument" (Hardin 1968) have accepted some of its conclusions, particularly the "limited good" perspective, indicating the probability of degradation of open-access resources (Foster 1963, Feeny et al. 1990). This is the case of pastoralism which, in the 1970s, was extensively seen in relationship with desertification processes and called for world-scale development projects intervening on what was at the core of Hardin's argument: private good seeking herders were increasing their flocks causing publicly perceived (open access) grazing land to decrease sharply in several world regions (Fratkin 1997). However, the main flaw with Hardin's argument was with the assumption that the actual division between public and a private good is perceived similarly across cultures, an argument which to most anthropologists is untenable. In several and different socio-cultural conditions, ethnographic evidence has demonstrated that local concepts of what should count as the public and the private spheres have been, first, historically determined (for the postsocialist transformation of property rights, see Hann et al. 2002). Secondly, this can depend on the types of good (James 2005), and also on the social, economic and political features of the groups who develop them. Hence, in order to propose a solution to this particularism, we have decided to follow a different approach, which do not start from the notions of what is usually seen as public and private goods in Western societies. Instead, we use a classifications of economic subsistence types formulated by anthropologists to generalize the socio-political features of pre-industrial societies and then we relate them to the public-private divide.

TABLE 1, (SUBSISTENCE AND ECONOMIC FORMS AND MOST COMMON SOCIO-POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS)

Subsistence/Economic Activity	**Social level**	**Political arrangement**	**Public vs. private good cultural preferences**
Foragers	Band	Acephalous, authority of elders	Preference towards publicly managed goods, few private goods
Horticulturalists	Kin group	Kin group leader, chiefdom	Private and public goods often convertible, redistribution as power strategy
Pastoralism	Clan	Tribal or segment leader	Private and public goods are strictly defined and separated
Agriculturalist/Commercial economy	Village	Territorial administration	No traceable preferences

Foragers

Foragers have societies in which real power holders are commonly not officially recognized. These groups live in small bands with semi- or fully nomadic character. Because of the importance they attribute to social harmony, sharing goods and avoiding conflicts is important. Instead ideas of reciprocity dominate economic behavior and the pursuit of private gain is avoided or kept secret because it is perceived as endangering the delicate collaborative structure of the band. In the 1960s these groups, who were facing worldwide dramatic population decrease and had become mostly confined to remote and extremely unproductive areas, were defined "affluent societies" (Sahlins1972). This idea was based on the custom that all caught game and most of gathered plants were to be shared among all community members, including those who for various reasons had not participated in hunting or gathering of plants. This, in spite of the recent environmental and popu-

lation changes, suggests that while the private/public goods dimension exists for foragers, the dichotomy has for this group the least importance because the cultural emphasis is on maintaining common access to the means of subsistence and the goods in question are is thus seen as public goods (Myers 1988; Ingold, Riches and Woodburn 1988; Burch and Ellanna 1996). This finding is confirmed by the quantitative experimental study on cooperation patterns that used simulation games over a number of indigenous populations and found that foragers scored the highest in the cooperative behavior thus, proving a general cultural predisposition towards seeing goods as public instead of private (Henrich et al. , 2005, 2010).

Horticulturalists

Horticulturalist societies practice technologically simple forms of agriculture. They prevalently live in tropical settings (Melanesia, Polinesia, Southeastern Asia and South America in the Amazonian regions) where they clear forest land for short periods and often switch to other land once cultivation has become unproductive. Unlike intensive agriculturalists, they don't have easily definable forms of private property and their living contiguously to tropical forests or highlands makes them unable to set clear boundaries and fences. Nonetheless, disputes over access to private goods are very common and abundant. Ethnographic research have shown these to be among the most belligerent groups among the three basic subsistence types (Richerson 2001). Horticulturalists live mainly in family or extended-kin social structures with leaders that can be appointed or belong to ruling kin groups. This is the subsistence type to which the famous figure of the Melanesian "Big Man", a charismatic leader who is elected by his people and maintains power thanks to a proper balance of personalistic networks and prestige, is attributed (Carrier 1992; Keesing 2002). Sahlins (1963) has characterized the Melanesian "Big Man" as an individual who is able to manage goods through redistribution and ostentation, who obtains such goods through marriage (often polygamous) and alliances and invest them back through collective feasts and banquets in order to maintain public support. One might say that notions of public and private goods are mutually convertible as the Big Man reconfigures them to remain competitive and maintain legitimacy. A further confirmation to this is that in the aforementioned game theory experiments horticulturalist people scored the least in terms of tendency towards cooperative behavior which we interpret as privileging private over public control of goods (Henrich et al., 2005, 2010).

Pastoralists

Among the three subsistence groups, pastoralists are the one to have a clear-cut definition of the public and private spheres but with a clearly marked tendency to value the latter. The idea of private good is easily possessed and communicated in these societies where material wealth (land and animals) mark social differences. However, the delineation of public goods is more problematic in these societies for a number of reasons. Pastoralist societies have often political structures that keep together different clans or lineages, sometimes in the form of segments, i.e. territorially based kinship groups or clan sub-units. These societies may or may not have strong leaders, but due to their corporate structure leaders are not able to rule without the (nearly) full support of the segments or tribes, and mainly of the elders. In this perspective, the pursuit of public goods is not only fundamental to the practice of herding, but it is strategic for maintaining inter-clan cohesion thanks to a number of arrangements to share grazing land (Livingstone 1986; Blewett 1995; Fratkin 1997; Taylor 2005). As could be expected, in the aforementioned experimental studies, pastoralist societies' scores for cooperation were intermediate between foragers and horticulturalists (Henrich et al. 2004: 14-15, 2005, 2010).

Finally, we assume that agriculture (intensive or extensive) practiced with more technologically advanced techniques and implying a more clearly defined concept of private property has a different effect on the partition of private versus public goods. Compared to the previous three subsistence forms, the factual extension of what should count as public goods is one that needs to be negotiated and defined differently for each agricultural or commercial economies. For instance it may be in the form of common grazing lands where herders are present. I can also be in the form of cooperative food processing plants, structures for irrigation or as shared crops among commercial producers.

Bribery among world indigenous cultures

The HRAF database shows that the word "bribe" has been found in 113 cultures which is 48% of the whole HRAF sample when European countries are excluded. The number of documents on which the term has been detected is 234, with a total of 375 entries. The geographical distribution is described in Table 2.

Table 2, (BRIBERY AMONG WORLD INDIGENOUS CULTURSE)

Africa	**Asia**	**America**	**Oceania**	**Total**
27	33	42	11	**113**

Source: (HRAF elaboration)

The regional distribution according to forms of economic activity is shown in Table 3.

Table 3, (SUBSISTENCE TYPES AND WORLD DISTRIBUTION)

	Africa	**Asia**	**America**	**Oceania**	***Total***
Foragers	2	1	11	1	***15***
Horticulturalists	8	3	9	4	***24***
Pastoralists	2	5	0	0	***7***
Agriculturalists/Commercial Economy	15	24	22	6	***67***
TOTAL	***27***	***33***	***42***	***11***	***113***

Source: (HRAF elaboration)

From these tables emerge two findings. The first is that there is not a wide difference among the three largest continents: Africa, Asia (including the Middle East) and America. What is striking is perhaps the third place occupied by African countries and the first by the countries on the American continent (including both Northern and Southern America). Oceanian cultures in HRAF are fewer and this explains the comparatively smaller number of cases in which bribery has been detected there.

More illuminating is the finding about economic or subsistence forms. As expected from our theory, the category agriculturalists/commercial economy contains the largest number of bribery entries in the ethnographic material. This supports the thesis that corruption is widely spread where public and private arrangements for the use of and access to resources and goods can be expected to vary a lot. Even more interesting is our finding that pastoralist societies are apparently the least exposed to corruption among the subsistence types. This also supports our theory since it is in this econom-

ic type of society that we should expect to find the least ambiguity between private goods (herds and land) and public goods.

The subsistence form in which bribery is most present is horticulture. Here, as assumed above, the distinction private-public is problematic for two reasons: the precarious access to economic resources and the shaky basis of political authority, which is highly contextual and strongly dependent on social rather than economic capital. Finally, foragers score a mid-range position. This finding is rather surprising, considering the neat orientation of these cultures towards public rather than privately-accessible goods. Moreover the fact that most of the foragers in which bribery was found are from the American continent suggests that before drawing any conclusion on this point it is necessary to introduce the distinction among fields in which bribery has been detected by ethnographers.

The fields of bribery

Table 4 summarizes the findings in the fields of bribery in the economic activities.

Table 4, (FIELDS OF BRIBERY AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY FORMS)

	Foragers	Horticulturalists	Pastoralists	Agriculturalists	Total
Judicial	2	10	4	75	91
Local Administration	2	16	2	61	81
Religion	5	5	1	38	49
Gifts	1	8	4	27	40
Private Sector	3	1	0	22	26
Marriage	2	0	2	18	22
Colonial Administration	6	0	0	15	21
Infrastructures	3	2	0	14	19
Interethnic Relations	2	1	0	11	14
Leisure	0	0	0	4	4
Other	0	0	0	8	8

Source: (HRAF elaboration)

Reading of this table is a more complex endeavor. The most evident outcome is the overall dominance of bribery in the judicial field, in 91 cases on 375 (it must be stressed that the number of cases is three time as that of the other cultures, because in many cultures there are more cases in which the word bribery is mentioned), followed by the field "local administration" with 81 entries. If one sums these two with the items "colonial administration" and "infrastructures", which make roughly the standard categories through which quality of government is assessed worldwide, the overall counts amount to 212, which makes 56.5% of the all circumstances in which bribery has been used for describing HRAF cultures. This is alone a demonstration that corruption is to be seen as a universal phenomenon, with the same features for more than half of the cases treated in this paper. However, the remaining 43.5% is interesting too, since it includes fields that belong mostly to the social rather than political field, such as gifts, marriage, religion and inter-group relations.

Looking at the breakdown for subsistence types it is possible to map some trends that relate to our general theory about the private and public access (or perceived access) to goods. First, it is interesting to notice that most of the cases in which the term bribery was found in foraging cultures refer to cases from native societies in Northern America. Being that these are societies that faced more violence acculturation from the European colonizers, this may suggests that in foraging societies the imbalance between public and private good has been introduced through external forces and it is not an endogenous process related to political administration. A second confirmation comes from the fact that foragers have the highest (still only 3 cases) score of "private sector" bribery among the three subsistence economic systems, when foragers do not traditionally have forms of commercial economy. It is a sign that external trade (as in the case of European colonizers of Native American lands) has intervened to put accent on the importance of private goods.

Secondly, horticulturalists and agriculturalists, with the due proportional differences, show similar trends: the judicial and the local administration are the most common fields in which the world bribery has been encountered, although in inverted fashion, where local administration has more counts than judicial bribery for horticulturalists. The subsequent importance, in rank of gifts, followed by religion, suggest that forms of bribery related to social exchange and reciprocity (most of religious forms of bribery are those defined as offers to chiefs and religious specialists as shamans and sorcerers) are also important. These trends suggest that horticulturalists have problems similar to those faced by agriculture and commerce based economic systems, i.e. corruption that is affected by the blurring of private and public spheres.

Thirdly, the case of pastoralists is a remarkable one in which bribery is almost absent. This subsistence type scores with only 7 world cultures, the majority of which is located in Central Asia, and 13 documented cases in which the word bribery is used. Also the distinction among fields does not provide hints on particular trends, where the judicial and gifts score at the same level (4 cases each) followed by local administration and marriage (2 cases each). The numbers are too small to make any generalization, however, the idea exposed above that this constitute the subsistence type which is the least exposed to corruption due to its clear distinction between private and public goods that is at the core of its economic strategies. This is also is supported by the fact that there is no field in which corruption stands as more evident than others.

Finally, the case of agriculturalists/commercial economy types of culture present a more balanced picture in which bribery appears for about 55% of the cases in the field of politics, 32% in forms of social exchange and 13% in commercial and other transactions. This composition makes up an allegedly fair picture of the incidence of corruption in industrial societies as well, even though the content of single fields can change or assume different denominations.

Conclusion

Understanding corruption in terms of the differences that cultures attribute to what should be seen as private or public goods can provide new and unexpected implications not only for a general theory on this phenomenon, but more significantly for its high degree of variation among societies. Our findings support our argument that corruption is a phenomenon that is universally understood in a similar manner across different cultures. The variation in how it is understood in different cultures does not relate to different moral understandings of the problem of corruption but to how different societies come to understand and value the difference between public and private goods and also what most people expect that most other people in their society will do when faced with opportunities for bribery. The use of the world largest sample of ethnographic material on indigenous societies may appear an unusual approach to deal with this phenomenon that has commonly been associated with imperfect democracies, inefficient market economies or authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, the persistence and resistance of corruption to definitive solutions in both time and space is itself a demonstration of the universality of this phenomenon, as well as of the perception of its harms to social well-being. Anthropology has long largely remained silent on the study of corruption, and its contributions have often been considered relativistic in nature, and hence incapable to contribute to modeling and policy making. In this study, however, we have demonstrated

that drawing on one of the few fields in which anthropological knowledge has downplayed the universalism-particularism puzzle, namely the relationship between ecological adaptation and socio-political organizations, it is possible to define and analyze corruption through cultural attributes. Our analysis support the claim that these attributes pertain to the sphere of how a social group meaningfully distinguish, interrelate and convert goods between the private and public domains.

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