

Informal Politics

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This article strives to explain the phenomenon of informality within the political sphere by referring to essential notions of social theory. It argues that there are two kinds of informality: “traditional” informality which is based on a process of traditional *Vergemeinschaftung* and “modern” informality, based on modern *Vergemeinschaftung* or social integration. Against that, formal political behaviour must be conceptualised in the context of modern law-based *Vergesellschaftung*. In order to support these hypotheses, the article refers to central ideas within German social theory, esp. M. Weber, N. Luhmann and J. Habermas, and stresses the necessity of a dialectic approach in the study of political phenomena such as informality and formality.

Introduction¹

The study of informal politics has become popular among political scientists.² We hear of the “informal” state of affairs in developing countries undermining processes that are hoped to eventually lead to democracy and state-building. In this context, informal politics is said to attack the rule of law, it causes corruption and

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² Cf. the overview in Helmke/ Levitsky 2004.

cronyism, cripples bureaucracy and is evaluated as being something crooked. We also hear, however, of “informal” politicking within international organisation, apparently adding to the flexibility and efficiency of these organisations. Here, informal politics supports the political process where the absolute rule of law would stifle smooth communication and is hence regarded as something useful. We hear - a third possibility - of an “informality” within Western states that is said to constitute a major problem of legitimacy. There, informality is said to exclude those from the political process who do not know the entrance to the channels and passages of informality, emphasising its somewhat dubious nature. Hence, informality is three in one: it is rather crooked in developing countries, it is useful in institutions of international governance, or it is dubious as part of Western political activity. We end up with a range of judgements on the same phenomenon depending on the context which one claims to observe.

If we look at the political science research concerned, we realise that the phenomenon of informal politics is far from being identified as a uniform phenomenon. So far, existing research has tended to choose either of two possible responses, the first being, *silence*. Informality is simply stated but left unexplained and never really approached. The second response is informality as the *non-formal*. Whereas understanding a certain phenomenon by way of this *via negationis* is legitimate, this should not leave us purely with a negative description. Otherwise, informal politics would be claimed to have no inherent nature but rather would live merely by contradicting the “normal”, formal form of political action. In this case, conceptualising happens by way of the negative deduction of an already known phenomenon, i.e. formal politics. If that is the sole way of conceptualisation, it is far from being a satisfactory academic approach.

The following essay will discuss informal politics within the two contexts already mentioned: informality in the context of developing societies and informality in the context of modern societies. It proposes two hypotheses. *Firstly, informal politics is based upon an act of Vergemeinschaftung in which traditional relations determine all political interaction. Thus it is an a priori fact before all formal and law-based politics. Secondly, informal politics is based upon an act of Vergemeinschaftung or social integration that tries to avoid the harshness of rational law; thus it is an a posteriori reaction to formal politics in*

*a modern context.*³ Informal politics must always be understood as being either a priori or a posteriori to formal politics, which means that law – the base of all formality – is the *tertium comperationis* in the distinction between the two kinds of informality. One does not need to understand the phenomenon of law-based formal politics in order to understand what might be called “traditional” informality. However, we have to come to an understanding of formal politics in order to understand what might be called “modern” informality. This *either/or* of informal politics is of ideal-typical nature and should not be taken literally when it comes to the phenomena as such but only as regards the scientific observation of these phenomena. It is an hermeneutical tool and does not claim to grasp the full content of any political action but only some dimensions of its underlying meaning.

The structure of this essay will reflect the twofold nature of informal politics. The somewhat shorter first section will look at traditional informal politics in conjunction with a review of the relevant literature. The somewhat longer second section will look at modern informal politics, again, in conjunction with a review of some of the relevant literature. The second part will also include some reflections on formal politics, as modern informality is understood to have come into being only after the emergence of modern formality in Western political systems. Both parts will draw heavily upon the classic work of M. Weber and his dynamic concepts of *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* (and not merely *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as with F. Tönnies). The thoughts of Weber will be complemented with additional ideas from continental social theory, esp. J. Habermas and N. Luhmann. This should help us in the comparison of various modes of political behaviour both in modern and emerging political societies.

“Traditional” Informality

Following my first hypotheses, it is claimed that informal politics must be understood as an act of traditional *Vergemeinschaftung* prior to the emergence of any formal politics based on modern law. In drawing upon the distinction between “traditional” and “modern”, I am certainly not aiming at evaluating political behaviour in a normative sense as was common within older modernisation theory.

³ These hypotheses have first been published in Conrad 2003.

Rather, I will try to use this somewhat antiquated terminology in a purely descriptive manner, enabling us to differentiate between modes of political behaviour which – on the phenomenological surface – may look rather similar, but as regards their underlying motivation must be seen as quite distinct.⁴ In the real world, informal politics within modern and traditional contexts may rather look similar and patterns of clientelism, corruption and cronyism can be found everywhere. Informal phenomena seem to be similar wherever they are observed. It is not the outer *form* of an action but its inner *motivation* that reveals something of the profound difference between the two types of informal politics.

Weber's characterisation of *Vergemeinschaftung* is as follows (1972: 21): “*Vergemeinschaftung*’ soll eine soziale Beziehung heißen, wenn und soweit die Einstellung des sozialen Handelns (...) auf subjektiv gefühlter (affektuel­ler oder traditionaler) Zusammengehörigkeit der Beteiligten beruht.”⁵ This sort of political behaviour occurs in an environment which lacks (ideal-typically!) any relevant “modern” elements, any formalisation of social and political relations and any efficacy of formal law in these relations. Instead, political behaviour is governed by commonly held traditions and rules, particular social hierarchies and a limited contingency when it comes to the openness and direction of the political process. Informality is the traditional, i.e. *a priori* mode of political action, the given and unquestionable framework of the communal set-up. All members of the community feel and accept that the traditional order and hierarchy are legitimate, “holy”, and must not be questioned. The community is based upon the validity of direct personal relationships such as patron-client relationships (Eisenstadt/Roniger: 1981). Within these relations, concepts like honour, personal loyalty and duty, and the dominance of community over the individual are pivotal. All political action strives to maintain this community and is not free to disregard it. Such a community is not ruled by positive decision-making and politics is not about establishing something drastically new, or about reforming or revolutionising society. Tradition is to be kept although it is far from static. Informal politics may therefore not be regarded as a law-defying reaction to the modernisation of soci-

⁴ Cf. for a similar approach Jung 2001.

⁵ “A social relation shall be called *Vergemeinschaftung* if and when the attitude behind social action is based upon the subjectively felt (in an affectual or traditional mode) association of those involved.” My translation.

ety. Informal politics, understood as an act of traditional *Vergemeinschaftung*, attempts to maintain the community in the face of a modern transformation of politics within society. It tries to maintain a community, and it does so effortlessly, i.e. naturally. It is not reflected upon and is the “default” mode of political behaviour within traditional communities.

Informal politics will follow the logic of the particular community it occurs in. Its exact framework may change according to the type of *Herrschaft*, e.g. patrimonialism, patriarchalism etc., which rules the community. These forms of *Herrschaft* will then have slightly diverging types of informal politics but with the “personal” dimension of rule being ever the same. Informal politics is then an unquestioned form of political action, and it is not limited by any formal, impersonal rules. In traditional society, informality is both unlimited and at the same time unheard of, as a thorough reflection of the nature of informal interaction does not take place. This is the significance of *a priori*. Formalisation and rationalisation of *Herrschaft* may bring confusion into society, thus e.g. changing patrimonialism to what is usually called neo-patrimonialism. Such modernisation will not dominate informal processes of *Vergemeinschaftung* but be generally dominated by them. Formalisation occurs tentatively and selectively, an aspect to which I will return later. In case of doubt or conflict one cannot rely on formal rules but on communal relations and hierarchies, patterns of reciprocity and duty. When it comes “to the crunch”, traditional politics will opt for informality.

When looking at relevant research on the topic, we may observe that this mode of traditional informality in the sense of *Vergemeinschaftung* is generally well recognised. However, by not referring to any profound analytical concept, the various explanations differ in terminology and lack hermeneutical clarity. In the field of transformation and democratisation studies, the general supposition is held that informal politics undermines the development of democracy in the Developing World. When Wolfgang Merkel & Aurel Croissant (2000: 18 ff.) refer to formal institutions, they speak of constitutions, laws and bureaucratic norms which have in common that they are all put in effect by the state. They are formal in the way that they apply to all people in the same manner; in that they are thereby inclusive. Against that, informal institutions are religious and/or traditional norms which have never been codified. The agents who enforce these norms have their roots not in the state but in society. Informal institutions are

accessible only to those who know of them and therefore they are exclusive. Merkel & Croissant conclude that the prevalence of informal institutions in many developing countries undermines the ongoing processes of democratisation and leads to so-called “defects” of democracy. An article by Hans Joachim Lauth (2000) presents a similar argument. According to Lauth, the four phenomena of clientelism, corruption, the threat to initiate a coup d'état, and civil disobedience are four influential informal institutions that are especially prevalent in transformation societies. They are informal as they cannot claim their legitimate existence by referring to written law put in effect by the state. They may be socially acceptable, but they are certainly not acceptable when confronted with contradicting legal principles.

Although the studies by Merkel/Croissant and Lauth both refer to central notions in the understanding of “traditional” informality, they could gain additional strength. Firstly, they could be somewhat more reluctant as regards their normative evaluation of informal political behaviour which limits their view on the phenomenon to a certain extent. Secondly, the results of both studies can easily be summarised and also focused by using the Weber's term of traditional *Vergemeinschaftung* which points to the central motivation of informality in many developing countries. Informal politics would then not only be understood in its negative comparison with formal and apparently “democratic” politics but could gain conceptual depth in itself.

Modern In-/Formality

A notion of modern formality is essential for an understanding of modern informality. Having already pointed to law as the base of modern formality and as the *tertium comparationis* between the two kinds of informality, I would like to embark on my analysis of modern informality after a short consideration of the formality of modern politics. This I would like to do by referring to Max Weber's terminology of *Vergesellschaftung*. Weber writes (1972: 21): “*Vergesellschaftung soll eine soziale Beziehung heißen, wenn und soweit die Einstellung des sozialen Handelns auf rational (wert- oder zweckrational) motiviertem Interessenaus-*

*gleich oder auf ebenso motivierter Interessenverbindung beruht.*⁶ Within Weber's general notion of modernity as a process of rationalisation, *Vergesellschaftung* is, as it were, the concept that speaks of the rationalisation of society (*Gesellschaft*). Three political institutions play a prominent role in Weber's reflections on modern *Vergesellschaftung*: the state, the law and the civil service (*Beamtentum*). It is not so much Weber's views on each of these institutions that are of interest in our context, but rather his claim that all three are intrinsically bound up with each other: The rational state "*beruht auf dem Fachbeamtentum und dem rationalen Recht.*"⁷ The bond between the modern, rational state and modern, rational law is particularly important if we aim to understand the roots of formal politics as the *tertium comparationis* between the two modes of informality. The "*Staatlichkeit des Rechts*" as Hermann Heller (1934: 187) calls it, i.e. the connection between the rationality of the state and the rationality of the law brings about formal politics. "Rationality", in this case, means calculability (*Berechenbarkeit*). You feed the rational machinery of the modern institutions at the top and know what it will (ideal-typically!) produce at the bottom.⁸ From machine-like calculability follows that (ideal-typically!) rational institutions work without contradiction. They are always designed to produce the intended results, hence their effectiveness, and hence their prevalence in modern society. Law is ascribed with such a rationality of calculability and non-contradiction. The idea behind it is that it does not engage with society at large but rests in its own, closed system of rationality.

The modern, rational state is an "*Anstaltstaat*", meaning that the state has effectively put its written rules at the very heart of its boundless dominion. Other sources of legitimate rule have been eradicated, competitors with the state and its law have effectively been uprooted, something N. Elias (1997: 230) refers to as "*Königsmechanismus*" and P. Bourdieu (1996: 99ff.) as "*esprits d'État*". The modern state draws its legitimacy from the fact that its citizens believe in its rule

⁶ "A social relation shall be called *Vergesellschaftung* if and when the attitude behind social action is based on an exchange of interest or relation of interest both of which are rationally motivated (rational as regards values or rational as regards utility)." My translation.

⁷ "... is based upon *Fachbeamtentum* and rational law." Ibid.: 815. My translation.

being based on legal principles (“*Glaube an die Legalität gesetzter Ordnungen*”; Weber 1972: 124). They do not allow themselves to be fooled by traditions, loyalty towards personal rulers, emotions or the charisma of a leader but are (ideally!) solely concerned that the state rules by following the proper legal procedures, which they, in turn, will also adhere to, a form of *Legitimation durch Verfahren* (Luhmann 1983). The law underlying the rule of the state is positive, meaning, it is put in effect by a decision. The law will not come about merely by following habits, social conventions or the local tradition; it will not be implemented by divine intervention such as the Ten Commandments. In all instances, and this is Niklas Luhmann carrying Weber’s argument on: modern, rational law will be decided upon by political actors, hence its positive nature.

Although, speaking from an historical viewpoint, modern law is at first something external to the society and the human being under its rule – and thus only *a posteriori* to traditional informality – it has a tendency to become “internalised” both by the individual and the society from which it attains an aura of naturalness. It aims to be regarded as *a priori*. Weber himself mentions that the law (*Rechtsordnung*) is not only an external fact but that it derives its significance from being turned into a social convention (*Sitte*) and that opposing it does not mean to oppose something external but something internal to both one’s personality and the make-up of society (Weber 1972: 195). In the language of N. Luhmann, formal organisation and expectation influence factual behaviour not by necessarily being put in effect with an ever conscious effort, but rather by being the frame in which all formal and informal behaviour legitimately exists (Luhmann 1976: 271). “*Man kann die Bedeutung der formalisierten Erwartungen daher nicht an der Häufigkeit ihres sichtbaren Gebrauchs, nicht an der Zahl der entsprechenden Interaktionen ablesen. Sie wirken durch die Präsenz des Möglichen.*” (Ibid.: 29ff.). Formal rules, expectations and institutions draw their efficacy from their general presence on the horizon of the possible. They are the ever watchful eye that limits the possibilities of behaviour. Furthermore, we may conclude that the modern state is characterised not by an untarnished formality of all political action, but by all political action having to occur under this watch-

⁸ Weber himself refers to modern law as a machine, *ibid.*: 817: “Was er [capitalism] braucht, ist ein Recht, das sich ähnlich berechnen läßt wie eine Maschine; rituell-religiöse und magische Gesichtspunkte dürfen keine Rolle spielen.”

ful eye of formality as the only source of true legitimacy. One is forced to think in the categories which the state and its bureaucracy provide by way of which the state “incarnates” itself in the societal and mental structures of its citizens. This incarnation creates the impression that the state is part of the natural world (Bourdieu 1996: 107). Not all politics abides to the letter of the law, but the letter of the law is the caveat (*Vorbehalt*) of all politics. Formal politics can thus be described as having formal law as a major motivational base of all political activity without being ultimately determined by that law.

State, law and bureaucracy are the three, very much intertwined institutions of modern society. They are the basis for the preponderance of formal politics in the modern world. Thus they are core to the process of *Vergesellschaftung* which in the context of this article is claimed to be the conceptual framework for an understanding of formal politics. This can now be described as coming out of the triangular relation of state, law and bureaucracy with the state being the overall framework, law being the dominant instrument and bureaucracy being the main agent in the formalisation of society.

Modern informal politics can only be understood as occurring within modern formal politics. I suggest to conceptualise it by using the term of modern *Vergemeinschaftung* or social-integration. In using the terminology of “social-integration”, I adopt some of J. Habermas’ basic thoughts for my purposes. Without wanting to confront readers with the somewhat cumbersome details of Habermas’ elaborate theoretical framework, the following points are of relevance here: the term social integration can be regarded as an antagonist to another classic concept, namely that of systemic integration. For the purpose of this article, systemic integration may be equated with Weber’s notion of *Vergesellschaftung*. The two concepts incorporate rather different dimensions, but they meet where they speak of a rationalisation of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) in modern society.⁹ Habermas’ claim is that modern society is characterised by a process of *Verrechtlichung* which refers to an increasing dominance of formal, positive rules in all spheres of society, including those where “communicative action” used to reign,

⁹ Habermas’ thoughts lend themselves to such an equation, cf. Habermas 1988: 447-462.

i.e. the life-world.¹⁰ Habermas calls this process the “colonisation of life-world.”¹¹ Formal, law-based politics as exemplified above is a resultant by-product of this tendency towards *Verrechtlichung* of society.

With that in mind, modern informal political behaviour may be described as an “action of reaction” to these tendencies of *Vergesellschaftung* in the form of *Verrechtlichung*, and in that informal politics is an act of social rather than systemic integration. In order to escape the rigidity of formal politics and the social frigidity it creates; in order to soften the rules that are thrust upon the lives of individuals and the community from within the bureaucratic field, informal patterns of action are willingly or unwillingly adapted to (re-)introduce notions of community. Informality may well have an instrumental and rational side to it, namely the rationality that does not want to trust in the rationality of formal processes alone. But informality also tries to overcome rational, political processes where they seem to become unbearable, violate individual notions of fairness or create an atmosphere of social indifference.

However, we should be on our guard: Formality and informality do not oppose each other in a linear manner in which informality tries to overcome a pre-existing formality, only in turn to be challenged by the return of formal rules which set out to limit the extent of the newly arisen informality, and so on. Although formality and informality lend themselves to such a rigid polarised description, they do depend on each other more than such a clear-cut linearity suggests. Formal and informal politics stand in a truly dialectic relation. It has, thus, been suggested that all formal organisation *includes* its own negation. Formal rules include their negation by informality; and solidified informality, i.e. informal rules include their negation by another twist of informality, and so on. “*Organisationen bestehen im beständigen Prozessieren ihrer eigenen Dekonstruktion.*”¹² Formality and informality can therefore never be divided from their own deconstruction by themselves or each other. Formal rules need to be put into practice which means that they are interpreted, changed or disposed of *in situ* (Ortmann 2003: 136). And this *in situ* alteration contaminates in turn the very

¹⁰ “*Verrechtlichung kommunikativ gesteuerter Handlungsbereiche,*” cf. *ibid.*: 522-524.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Organisations exist through ever processing their own deconstruction.” Ortmann 2003: 106. My translation.

act of deciding upon the formal rule in the first instance: “*Alles Entscheiden, alles Handeln in Organisationen ist von Abweichung und Informalität kontaminiert.*”¹³ Formality and informality are not in a rigid polarised relation to one another, but in their polarisation recursively depend on each other.

If categories become so fluid, why is it then that modern society does not crumble under an ever growing informality and lawlessness? Or why does it not freeze under the tense pressure of formal rules? In order to explain the stable yet dialectic nature of society, one may examine the feature of repetition (Ortmann 2003: 147). Repetition is the tendency of an action to imitate another action. This tendency will result in a chain of action which will be constituted of never quite identical actions, none of which, however, completely misses the mark of the generally acceptable. The individual actions organise themselves and become conditioners of each other. The origin of an action is not an *a priori* norm, but the realm of actions itself. Thus neither formal order nor informal disorder reign in modern society, but rather the self-organisation of a system of recursive actions, never quite formal, never quite informal. Such a system of self-organisation oscillates continually between order and chaos. On the one hand formal rigidity threatens, and on the other hand looms the informal mess.

Where does this leave us regarding our question concerning the roots of modern informal politics? First, informal politics in a modern context cannot be understood without reference to formal politics; and formal politics cannot be understood without reference to informality. The two are linked in that informal politics always and only occurs within the boundaries of formal politics. As I stressed earlier, modern politics will rarely be entirely formal or true to the letter of the law. But it is important to note that the *possibility* of strictly formal action remains. Thus modern politics is characterised not by its *regular* behaviour, which would indeed be informal. Modern politics is to be characterised by its *exceptional* behaviour, a behaviour which one can legitimately fall back on in case of doubt, conflict or emergency. In these instances, formality will always overrule informality, hence the talk of *modern* society. When it comes “to the crunch”, modern politics and society will opt for formality. Second, the notion of repetition

¹³ “All decision making and action within organisations is contaminated by deviation and informality.” Ibid.: 136f. My translation.

is one dimension explaining why informality usually does not become endemic in modern politics. Another dimension is the above mentioned internalisation of a formal *habitus* by the citizens of the state. Both repetition and internalisation ensure that informal politics will always remain in a gravitation field of which formality, enforced by the state in its law-making capacity, constitutes the centre of attraction. At times closer, at other times more distant, informal politics will always evolve around the central idea of formality as a constitutional mark of modern politics.

Such a complex construction of formality and informality in modern politics is somewhat lacking in most research on modern political systems. While notions of the recursive nature of informal and formal politics as well as conflict and mediation between the two spheres are being discussed, the debate could surely benefit from a more theoretical grounding. For so far it has often focused on the function or legitimacy of informal political processes alone and failed to provide a theoretical background. One way of dealing with informality has been to say that informal behaviour is a complement to formal politics, in conditions when a law-based only approach would be highly inefficient. Renate Mayntz (1998) regards informal practices as functional where limits of time or the complexity of the formal political process or insecurity result in a divergence from the “normal” formal procedure. Formal procedures have been put in place by a legitimate institution (e.g. the state), informal procedures are stable, non-formal types of “*Politikverfertigung*” (56) or “politicking” as K. Palonen (2003) calls it. In this scenario, informality is basically a natural way of complementing formality. K. von Beyme (1991) points out that governance (*Regieren*) occurs on a continuum between formality on the one hand and non-formality on the other. Non-formality again is differentiated into action which is simply non-conform and action clearly opposing formal rules. Unfortunately, we are not provided with a guide on how to strike the difference between the two. Looking into the institutional set-up of the European Union, more recent research by H. Farrell & A. Héritier (2003: 581) characterises formal institutions, rather conventionally, as “written rules enforced by a third party” and informal institutions as “enforced by the actors themselves.”, the actors in this case being, respectively, the European Parliament and the European Council. It is Farrell & Héritier who point towards a recursive relation between formal and informal procedures in which the latter

“may have an important impact on institutional outcomes. These informal institutions may be influenced by the formal framework in which actors operate” (580). According to J. Rosenau informality plays a crucial role in all global modes of governance where a range of rather diverse institutions, organisations, networks, etc. are supposed to govern the world’s affairs. Here, as with all the other authors, formal governance is based upon being constitutionally adopted and informal governance is “created through repeated practices that are regarded as authoritative even though they may not be constitutionally sanctioned” (2002: 72), which indeed they cannot be in the absence a global state with a corresponding global body of law.

Stressing the functional character of informal political behaviour may sometimes brush over problems that arise with an increase in *Vergemeinschaftung*-based political behaviour. *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* need to balance one another as both come with their own extremes which need to be avoided. Hence, following another way of dealing with informality, E. Bohne (1981: 231) emphasises that “*informale Handlungsmuster werden weitgehend vom Tauschpotential der Akteure und damit von den jeweils bestehenden Machtverhältnissen bestimmt.*”¹⁴ The dominance of power relations within informal relations stands against a legally guaranteed position in formal relations. Bohne’s conclusion is that “weak” actors are put at a disadvantage when informality reigns (ibid.). M. Th. Greven (2005) is equally sceptical when faced with the claim that informality is a functional complement to formal politics. He attests that this may well be the case, but his central claim is that informal politics puts legally guaranteed rights of citizens at risk by making the access to political decision-making less transparent: “While these developments [of informalisation in European politics; B.C.] are intended to and may in fact sometimes enhance the problem solving capacity and effectiveness of trans- and supranational governments, they decrease the degree of transparency, accountability and thus finally legitimacy not only of European politics but any kind of trans- or supranational government.” (ibid.).

¹⁴ “Informal patterns of action are mostly determined by the capability of exchange among actors and thereby by the existing distribution of power.” My translation.

Conclusion

The terminological pair of *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* could indeed serve to focus the debate which so far has hardly advanced theoretically. This essay has identified a process of *Vergesellschaftung*, i.e. formalisation as central to modern politics “only” in the way that modern politics may in case of doubt, conflict or emergency, i.e. in *exceptional* circumstances, fall back into a rigidly formal, law-based frame of action. This formal behaviour will then be deemed to be an acceptable and even necessary way for dealing with the situation. Formality can thus be described as either the core of all modern political action, or even better: as the fringe, the horizon of the same. Within that horizon, formality will never be pure and more often than not, political action will follow the pattern of modern informality which we understand as an act of modern *Vergemeinschaftung* or social integration. And again: social integration should be regarded as the heart of things rather than really explaining all facets of informality in a modern society. In case of corruption, nepotism and other regular informal political practices, it would be nonsense to claim that they are merely trying to overcome the rigidity and frugidity of modern regulations and law-based politics. These phenomena rather point towards the necessity of the horizon of formality within which all informality exists and without which modern society would indeed tilt towards a state of informal disorder. We cannot play-off formal and informal politics against each other but have to acknowledge the dialectic rather than functional relation between the two. We always have to defend the one against the other, and this approach is somewhat absent in research so far. Thus modern society and politics are in a tension between formality and informality with their respective dangers. The two do not exist separately from each other. They are forever joined in a state of *limbo*, as it were, and only the two processes of repetition and internalisation will prevent the one from eventually winning over the other. Formal and informal are held together by them.

Informality in the sense of traditional *Vergemeinschaftung* does equally exist only in ideal-typical thought patterns. The real-typical phenomena speak of a complex blend between these forms of traditional informality and modernising forces. This blend of traditional and modern elements of politics has been called “*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*”, the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous (Bloch 1984: 104ff.; Jung 2001). It refers to the simultaneous,

contradictory and again dialectic existence of both traditional and modern forms of social organisation. In our case, we mean the simultaneous and contradictory existence of both informal and formal types of political behaviour so that traditional communities may well have formal political institutions. These exist, however, without the back-up of actual formal political behaviour but are used by the political agents for strategies of traditional *Vergemeinschaftung*. And again, formal and informal spheres are not merely two coherent blocks in opposition. As modern formality and modern informality contaminate each other in the real phenomena, so do modern formality and traditional informality. Modern formality, most often in the form of the law and the state, is implanted in a traditional society which is thereby drastically changed without ever producing anything that resembles formal politics. Traditional society in the reverse changes imported formal institutions so that they will fall under its dominant grasp. Neither formal organisation nor informal community remain untouched, both are contaminated by each other. Again, we end up with characterising politics as being in a dialectic state of limbo between the formal and the informal, albeit, with the difference that this time informality and *Vergemeinschaftung* are the governing principles that, in conflict, will overrule formality and *Vergesellschaftung*.

Weber's terminology, supplemented with commentaries by later social theorists, serves well to constructively approach the otherwise rather obscure notion of informality within political science. Tracing the current debate has revealed that, to some extent, the underlying notions of *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* are indeed being discussed. This essay aimed to make explicit a debate which so far seemed somewhat implicit. It also aimed to stress the dialectic nature of the two processes in both traditional and modern political communities.

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