

Corruption in pre-modern societies

CHALLENGES FOR HISTORICAL
INTERPRETATIONS

Edited by
MARIA FILOMENA COELHO
LEANDRO DUARTE RUST



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Corruption in the Middle Ages as a research problem

MARIA FILOMENA COELHO¹

The classic meaning of the word *corruptio* is corrosion, i.e., the result of the inexorable process of decomposition that affects living beings from the moment of their birth. Corrosion affects individual bodies as much as social bodies, and definitions of what corrodes them are the key to identifying actions and behaviours to combat it. Christianity, as the religion of the Roman Empire, is indebted to this perception, which was updated over the centuries by thinkers and rulers, but also by the diverse ways in which the ordinary people understood and disseminated this modular principle of life in society. In the Middle Ages and in the Modern Age, Western Christian kingdoms were repeatedly concerned about corruption, as demonstrated by the profusion of doctrines and legal apparatuses aimed at curbing it. But despite their tireless efforts, the struggle proved to be inglorious.

In this regard, the Contemporary Era aims to inaugurate a “new era”. In fact, in this and ‘all’ other senses of life! Roughly speaking, the solutions to the scourges that affected life in society stemmed from a lack of scientific knowledge about the functioning and “backward” ancestral logics that prevented the progress and modernization needed to reach ‘truly’ civilized standards. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the elimination of corruption became the foundation of a modern, developed nation. Measures and procedures were established that would lead to the stage of virtue. However, it was from the second half of the 20th century onwards that the basic principles of impersonality and publicity in the handling of public affairs took on a more defined form, even feeding into a ranking of the most and least corrupt countries, with a direct impact on the prestige of nations and the level of trust that their governments inspire. Financial and commercial transactions, as

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well as the ability to be a major player on international stages, can depend on the levels of corruption measured in each country. There are many different methodologies for measuring international standing, but there is a particularly important one based on citizens' perceptions of the public environment and corruption practices.²

The means of eliminating or at least drastically reducing corruption is instituted by the countries that have managed, in their recent history, to defeat the 'monster'. These are states of the so-called "First World", among which the Nordic countries stand out. In the field of corruption studies, Denmark is a success story and has even named the methodology to be adopted by nations wishing to reach the same stage: "a path to Denmark". A country whose history, like the rest of Europe, has seen dramatic levels of corruption over the centuries, had adopted radical measures to eliminate corrupt practices from public life. The state was established based on law, rationality, impersonality, transparency, and control of public officials. Although Denmark has become something of an image for anti-corruption campaigns, it is not the only country to boast of this virtue, sharing with others the rigorist halo that, if not exactly deserved, is at least announced as a goal to be achieved. This is the case of countries with greater economic weight that have not yet 'become Denmark', but which argue that this is the only way to combat corruption on a global scale.³

The method is clearly designed to eradicate conducts that harm the common good. Under the Rule of Law, the basic model of First World countries, laws define what corruption is, prevent it from occurring and penalize criminals. Objectively, "corruption" is conceptualized. In other words, the problem is circumscribed so as not to leave room for circumstantial interpretations that weaken the power of the law. Subjectivities have been translated into centuries of personalistic logics that interpreted the abundant anti-corruption laws according to ties, making them ineffective. It became clear that, in addition to well-worded laws, it would be necessary to have a cultural change that would transform people into individuals/citizens whose predominant ties no longer depended on family and religion but would

² Established by Transparency International in 1995, the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) evaluates 180 countries and territories and assigns scores on a scale between 0 and 100: transparenciainternacional.org.br. Produced by International Transparency since 1995.

³ For a critical analysis: KROEZE, R.; VITÓRIA, A.; Geltner, G. (Org.). Introduction. *Anticorruption in History: From Antiquity to the Modern Era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 1-20.

place them definitively in the sphere of the nation-state. Only in this way would it be possible to disseminate impersonal logics in the handling of public affairs, which are essential to extinguish embezzlement and misappropriation of funds.

The problem was seen as a misconduct, a moral issue. In fact, since ancient times, corruption and the relevant solutions have been considered in this way. In the pursuit of wealth and power, people lose their sense of the common good and tend to selfishly appropriate, for their own benefit, what should benefit everyone. The remedy stipulates what should not be done and provides for exemplary punishments to discourage those who are tempted to commit crimes against the common good. Approached from this angle, after centuries of experience, the inefficient result is plain to see. The queue of convicts is endless, linking the past to the present, with inexorable continuity into the future.

However, there is another way of looking at it: politically. Although the accusations fall on individual behavior, history - including the most recent times - shows that these are moves in the political game, aimed at undermining certain interests and groups in control of public affairs. The cases are almost endless and well known, although they do not really take centre stage in the arguments of public opinion, which, in the end, prefers to aim its artillery at the individual weaknesses of the accused who could not resist the temptation to make a profit.

But the political field also offers another perspective for studying the problem, which is usually hidden, linked to the meaning of the model that shapes society. In academic terms, this is the field of political philosophy, or what Pierre Rosanvallon called “the political”.⁴ This will be one of the main aspects we will try to explore, set in the Middle Ages.

I.

The Middle Ages are an interesting historical period in which to understand the complexity of the problem of corruption. First, because it is a time that common sense — and even historians — consider to be corrupt by nature. As Leandro Rust has pointed out, researching the topic in this chronology would constitute a kind of ‘non-theme’, since corruption, by being part of the culture itself, would create a discursive

⁴ ROSANVALLON, Pierre. *Por uma história do político*. São Paulo: Alameda, 2010.

sustaining effect that would make analysis impossible.⁵

The most eloquent evidence would lie in the way medieval societies mixed the public and the private, resulting in a lack of definition. The logic of power and government of public affairs was based on personalist principles, strongly dynamized by feudalism.⁶ The characteristics of social relations, guided by bonds of loyalty and vassalage, which ran vertically and horizontally along the social pyramid, would make it impossible to conceive of a model that separated the public from the private. The very definition of “fiefdom” as a benefit, in exchange for which the beneficiary must provide a service to the benefactor, would help to cement the confusion between the two spheres. The benefits granted by the powerful to those of a lower social and/or political level often have implications for the management of public life, linked to justice and administration. The gifts distributed, in the form of offices, turn those who receive them into “obligees”, feeding an endless dynamic chain of personal ties. A gift is given to those who deserve it, because they have proven themselves capable of providing a service to the lord.

This panorama was aggravated by the fact that what the lords distributed to their vassals would be the result of the misappropriation of wealth and instances of power that were once public. These were institutional capacities (legal and fiscal) inherited from the Roman Empire, which in the High Middle Ages would end up being exercised by the Christian aristocracy (secular and ecclesiastical). In historiographical terms, the context is often referred to as the pulverization of state power, a centrifugal dynamic that over the centuries would produce scenarios classified as feudal political anarchy. An era in which the public good was corrupted. The power exercised by the Christian aristocracy, at local and regional level, as the ability to organize collective life, the production and distribution of wealth, and to “say justice” (*iudicare*), is hardly recognized in historiography as a manifestation of the “public”. For this period, royalty and the high clergy (secular and regular) are recognized as surviving

⁵ RUST, Leandro. A “corrupção” na escrita da História Medieval: os desafios de um efeito de sustentação discursiva. *História da Historiografia: International Journal of Theory and History of Historiography*, Ouro Preto, v. 15, n. 38, p. 201–230, 2022.

⁶ See, for example, the following excerpt, from whose conclusions we intend to depart in this article: “...what we in modern times would regard as corruption and abuse was in fact embedded in the nature of medieval society itself. Society was in turn subject to the relations created through or developed within “bastard feudalism”, the malign effects of which were supposedly manifested in perversion of justice, the parading of retainers and co-operation in disputes. [...] The failure of providing a panacea suggests a profound limitation of perspectives, but also emphasizes the reality of medieval society both for contemporaries and for historians: *bastard feudalism* was society and it was impossible to stand outside it”. MUSSON, Anthony (Ed.). *Crime, law and society in the Middle Ages*. Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 250-251.

institutions of public power, even though their ability to govern up to what would be required within these standards is always evaluated negatively. Feudal traits were also evident in the way secular and ecclesiastical political leaders governed. From this perspective, emperors, kings, dukes, counts, popes, bishops and abbots exercised power through personalistic values, based on the logic of service and benefit, whose distributed gifts originated from “public good”.

II.

Today, studies on corruption are a huge field, which is the size of the problem. Corruption theory brings together researchers from quite different areas of knowledge, among which historians play a key role. History of the contemporary period and the so-called History of the Present concentrates most of the research, but there is also a strong interest in pre-modern times.

The protagonism of the Modern Age stands out, especially in the colonial world. The bibliographic production on corruption on Hispanic America is notorious, with prominent authors such as Francisco Andújar and Pilar Ponce Leiva.⁷ On the same period, but concerning Portuguese America, Adriana Romeiro and Roberta Stumpf are important references.⁸ The plethora of documents, both quantitative and qualitative terms, has allowed research groups to provide a complex picture, enabling us to understand the challenge of identifying and explaining the interconnections that shaped corruption in certain times and spaces of the past.

In terms of academic visibility, studies on corruption in antiquity are restricted

⁷ The work of both authors is extensive, but we only quote: ANDÚJAR CASTILLO, Francisco. El sonido del dinero. Monarquía, ejército y venalidad en la España del siglo XVIII. Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2004; ANDÚJAR CASTILLO, F. La quiebra de la justicia distributiva en el siglo XVII: venalidad y patronazgo. In: PARDO MOLERO, J; VERDET MARTÍNEZ, N.; ANDRÉS ROBRES, F. (Coord.). *¿Al servicio de quién? Poder, instituciones y familia en la Monarquía de España*. Granada: Comares Historia, 2022, p. 17-32; ANDÚJAR CASTILLO, F. Historiando la corrupción: propuestas de metodología de investigación". In: PARDO MOLERO, J.F.; RUIZ IBÁÑEZ, J.J. (eds.) *Los mundos ibéricos como horizonte metodológico*. Homenaje a Isabel Aguirre Landa. Valencia: Ed. Tirant lo Blanch, 2021, p. 289-310. PONCE LEIVA, P. Acusaciones de corrupción y prácticas sociales infamantes. Quince años en la vida de Agustín Mesa y Ayala (1670-1685), contador de la Real Hacienda de Quito. *Revista Complutense de Historia de América* 43, 2017, p.49-74; PONCE LEIVA, P. Percepciones sobre la corrupción en la Monarquía Hispánica. In: PONCE LEIVA, P.; ANDÚJAR CASTILLO, F. (Eds.). *Mérito, venalidad y corrupción en España y América, siglos XVII y XVIII*. Valencia: Albatros, 2016, p. 193-212.

⁸ ROMEIRO, A.. A corrupção na Época Moderna. Conceitos e desafios metodológicos. *Tempo. Revista do Departamento de História da UFF*, v. 21, p. 1-30, 2015. ROMEIRO, A.. Corrupção e poder no Brasil - uma história, séculos XVI a XVIII. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2017. STUMPF, Roberta. O ideal de bom governo e os instrumentos de controle do oficialato português. Goiás, segunda metade do século XVIII. In: GAUDIN, G.; STUMPF, R. (Dir.). *Las distancias en el gobierno de los imperios ibéricos*. Concepciones, experiencias y vínculos. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2022, p.167-185. STUMPF, Roberta. Formas de venalidad de oficios na monarquia portuguesa do século XVIII. In: STUMPF R.; CHATURVEDULA, N. (orgs). *Cargos e ofícios nas monarquias ibéricas: provimento, controle e venalidade (séculos XVII-XVIII)*. Lisboa, CHAM, 2012, p. 279-298.

almost exclusively to the Roman Empire, with special emphasis on the phenomenon of clientelism. Although there are researchers dedicated to analysing corruption in Athens and Sparta, the results do not go far enough to undermine Rome's prominence in the field.⁹

Regarding the Middle Ages, there have been very few initiatives, due to the perception that it was a naturally corrupt period. However, occasionally there are research papers on corruption, published in the form of scientific articles, but they are clearly not among the central concerns of their authors.¹⁰

Even though these are quite different historical periods, there are some common threads between the analyses that are worth highlighting. The first undoes the *a priori* distinction between public and private that would have been characteristic of pre-modern times. The profusion of anti-corruption laws in any of these periods shows that historical agents identified the existence of a public sphere that needed to be protected from private appropriation. However, it stands out that the laws were repeatedly broken by all those involved, configuring a lax legal scenario. Secondly, the case studies show that there was no conceptual precision regarding corruption in pre-modern times, generating permanent ambiguity that lent itself to political games. In other words, accusations of corruption were common weapons in the hands of powerful groups and individuals to target political enemies. The struggle for power, especially about the control and distribution of common wealth, used accusations of corruption to eliminate competition, leaving the way clear for the victors. Thus, the same action could be - or not - corruption, depending on the convenience of those involved. A royal official in the colony who used money from His Majesty's Treasury to give a banquet could be considered corrupt or a promoter of royalty and, consequently, a criminal or, on the contrary, a promoter of the common good.

These conclusions, anchored in a myriad of similar cases, end up giving shape to another, more comprehensive one, which identifies culture as the key to explanation. Because these were "still" pre-modern societies, with little capacity to understand the correct logic of how institutions work, their public agents had conceptions and

⁹ FAVERSANI, Fábio. A corrupção dos antigos e a nossa: apontamentos para o estudo da corrupção romana. *Revista Phoinix*. Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Available at: <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/phoinix/article/view/32327>. Accessed: May 5, 2021.

¹⁰ In order to look at corruption at that time from another perspective, the *De Corruptione* research group was created, based at the University of Brasilia, which brings together historians at different stages of their academic life, with results that have been published at: www.decorruptione.com.

behaviours that were not adequate. However, it should be emphasized that, unlike more traditional historiographical analyses with an institutionalist bias, which tend to evaluate the performance of these agents in an anachronistic way, there is currently a culturalist tendency, which tends to justify what is identified as the political culture of those societies.¹¹ In this sense, the researcher should be able to understand different logics - specific of the “other” - through which “corruption” functions as a social mortar. Therefore, instead of being a problem, it would be a positive and indispensable factor for social cohesion.¹²

This approach, however, fails to explain why, at certain times, waves of accusations of corruption erupt in these societies. If the phenomenon were always of a “beneficial nature”, the accusations and the drafting of anti-corruption laws would make no sense. The research challenge lies in discovering what “cracks up” so that society identifies the existence of corruption which, regardless of the historical period, is always seen as an evil to be extirpated. In methodological terms, it will be necessary to consider the cultural “nature” of personal ties as part of the political architecture, subject, like any principle, to having its interpretation and accomplishment disputed. The scenarios to be analysed must be broad. Pursuing only the legislative track does not seem to be enough. Looking for answers only in what anti-corruption laws circumscribe as such leaves out various areas of norms and social relations that also constituted — and still constitute today — consensuses which, once neglected by agents, make corruption emerge.

The relevance that the analysis of laws has assumed in the study of corruption is undoubtedly due to the breadth of the institutionalist references of the 19th century, to which is added the weight that the Rule of Law model has achieved today. But reducing the selection of documents to this typology runs the risk of only following the path that the lawmakers want us to follow. A methodological choice guided by an

¹¹ However, the culturalist approach in corruption studies can also serve to negatively evaluate the societies analyzed, for example: “In a society where gifts and favours were an expected and accepted feature of social transactions, the receiving of gifts, for instance, may simply have been regarded as one of the entitlements of office with little attention paid to the motives of the giver. Moreover, there can be less of a clear demarcation of official conduct when lines of appropriate behaviour were hazy even to contemporaries. There was nevertheless a perceived difference between oiling the wheels and setting them upon a different track. To an extent therefore what we in modern times would regard as corruption and abuse was in fact embedded in the nature of medieval society itself. Society was in turn subject to the relationships created through or developed within ‘bastard feudalism’, the malign effects of which were supposedly manifested in perversion of justice, the parading of retainers and co-operation in disputes.” MUSSON, Anthony; POWELL, Edward. *Crime, law, and society in the Latter Middle Ages*. Manchester/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 250.

¹² It should be noted that this approach also affects societies that are not part of the First World, especially Latin American, African and some Asian societies.

anachronistic vision, seduced by the current monopolistic prestige of state laws, without realizing that the prescriptive character of these devices circumscribes the possibilities and the field of what is classified as corruption. Nowadays, corruption is only what the anti-corruption laws dictate. However, considering laws in times before the present requires understanding that they formed part of a broader normative complex, which included, for example, the divine and ecclesiastical forums, and whose dynamics in formal terms will always be relational. Laws are part of formal law, as are customs and other norms that are not always easy to map, but which, depending on the circumstances, could be preponderant.

This does not mean abandoning the study of laws in favour of other types of documents. The often doctrinaire and casuistic nature of legal codes makes it possible, for example in the Middle Ages, to see what kind of arguments legislators used to identify and define corruption. Dense description can be a good strategy for highlighting the different referential repositories used, as well as the interweaving of moral and ethical logics and arguments. The challenge, however, lies in not giving the work done at this stage, which will inevitably lead to conclusions that reinforce a panorama crossed by casuist and the elastic and ambiguous way in which agents react to corruption.

In fact, the specific case is always ambiguous. It is not difficult to see in each plot the conscious way in which the historical actor's resort to ambiguity as a way of presenting their case. This is not, therefore, a conceptual incapacity. The dissolution of ambiguity depends on how the socially competent authorities process the specific case. As we know, there are many possibilities, as well as the instances authorized to operate the process. Thus, analysing circumstances requires the researcher to also perceive the conscious recourse to ambiguity, avoiding conclusions that always attest to laxity or legal ineptitude.

III.

Corruption is a kind of word which houses a semantic field that, since ancient times, has served as a device to modulate the practices of appropriation and distribution of wealth considered common to all. Obviously, the negative charge attributed to the word, once formulated, evokes and promotes its opposite as virtue. Around the ability to classify corruption lies the main subject of human societies: the

management of wealth, the government of public affairs (*res publica*). By accusing groups, individuals and acts as corrupt, they are saying that they have misappropriated the wealth that belongs to everyone. But at the same time, it reinforces the legitimacy of those whose appropriation is virtuous and promotes the common good.

Pre-modern Western societies were hierarchical and elitist models, based on the privileges of the higher orders. In the Middle Ages, this conception was presented as nature, sacralised by Christianity, configuring an ideology that legitimized the fact that an aristocracy appropriated wealth and promoted its distribution through strategies that guaranteed the hegemony of its power. The corporative model, inherited from Antiquity and strongly Christianized in the Middle Ages, will be widely disseminated and its functionalist logics easily understood at all social levels. Each person and human group are born with a function that is essential to the existence of the social body and which cannot be altered or harmed, otherwise the collective will be negatively affected. Just as in the biological body, the functions of the parts do not have the same weight. Some are more important than others, and some are even considered essential for the life of the body. The head is the fundamental part, responsible for governing the body, assisted by the upper limbs. The size of the responsibility requires that this *optima pars* be rewarded in accordance with the function assigned to it, so that it can fulfil it correctly. From this perspective, it was justified that a small part of society should have the duty to appropriate wealth to redistribute it according to the model. The elitist characteristics, in turn, were justified in view of the meaning of the Christian model: to ensure that society was correctly guided on the path to Salvation. The importance of the mission required knowledge and ability, of which only the higher orders (secular and ecclesiastical) were custodians. Therefore, the appropriation of wealth was seen not only as a legitimate possibility, but as a duty, and its distribution, by criteria that guaranteed the reproduction of the model itself, was presented as justice - "to each his own".¹³

The seizure of wealth according to these criteria was a virtuous action, as it was interpreted as necessary for the fulfilment of the common good. The salvation of Christendom required wisdom inherited from ancestors or acquired through formal aristocratic education. The repository of knowledge was the monopoly of the lineages

¹³ *Suum cuique tribuere*. Digest (1.1.10.1 Ulpiano).

and their members — secular and ecclesiastical — embodied and defined the common good. As an essentialist principle, therefore, any action carried out by the Christian aristocracy would be for the good of society, even if it benefitted particular people or groups to the detriment of the whole. The key point was to promote to the category of general interest what — we know — was a private interest. It should therefore be emphasized that, according to the model, the “private/particular” does not erode the public. The method for operating such a shift lay in the ability to build networks of relationships whose interweaving shaped the “public space”. It was these social relationships that shaped “the public”.¹⁴

However, the method that guaranteed a virtuous quality to the action was also the gateway to corruption, considering the distortion of procedures. From being promoters and benefactors of the “public”, the virtuous could become its corrupters. For their contemporaries, it was precisely through this loophole that accusations of corruption infiltrated and wreaked damage on the opposing political camp. The scenarios presented by the documentary evidence are circumstantial political disputes accompanied by speeches accusing corruption of destroying the common good. But on closer scrutiny, it is possible to see that the accusation is a symptom of a disturbance in a certain “order”. Something has shaken the norms that governed social relations and managed the “public”. A consensus around certain norms of conduct has been broken, requiring rearrangements and punishments. From this perspective, “the public” is a relational category whose existence depends on standardisation. In the case of an aristocratically conceived society, the standardization/configuration of the public will necessarily be elitist and exclusionary, subjecting the bundle of relationships to permanent political tension. It is also interesting to note that it is at times of increased or scarce resources that accusations of corruption become more recurrent.

The administration of resources also requires the management of social relations, through which goods are circulated and handled. This is the meaning of the word economy (*oikonomia*): management of the household. This was understood as the universe of the social relations of the group, the kinship, the lineage. The means of accessing and managing wealth requires integrating into an order external to the

¹⁴ To understand how some medievalists dialog with Habermas' idea of the “public sphere” and “public space”, see: OFFENSTADT, Nicolas; BOUCHERON, Patrick. *L'espace public au Moyen Âge*. Débats au tour de Jürgen Habermas. Paris: PUF, 2011.

group and, at the same time, creating an internal one, with often unpredictable results in terms of power. In both the public and domestic spheres, crises erupt when the order of the political game is disrespected. For researchers, it is usually the results of these clashes that are recorded in historical documents, in the form of discourses that frame the actions to be condemned. They are politicized by means of an intellectual, legal deposit, etc., which the accusers use.

The discourses are based on another kind of order, which comes from the political architecture, in other words, from what Pierre Rosanvallon calls “the political”.¹⁵ The model language is appropriated by the political game that makes the accusations robust and scandalous. Undoubtedly, allegations of corruption need the “voice of the people” to thrive, and this particularity provides a promising framework for research into the problem.¹⁶

IV.

One of the major challenges facing the researcher is that the word “corruption” does not appear frequently in the documents. There is therefore a lexical problem to solve. Positive and negative words adjectivize conduct, and the presence of gifts (of any kind) as a tool for operating social relations can be a good clue to follow. The way in which the positive is transformed into the negative — and vice versa — and the power to interpret and classify an objective action are also interesting keys. The fact that one historical actor does not classify a certain action as corruption does not mean that another could not. Isn't that what allowing us to identify the political “move”, even as omission/silence? And from an analytical perspective to what extent would we be able to identify, in terms of the past, when an act with corrupt characteristics was not classified as such?

Although it is no easy task to deal with a vast lexicon, there are a few words to pay special attention to. The main one is injustice. Its opposite, justice, is the foundation of power, which legitimizes the rule of the political head over the social body, whether

¹⁵ "In speaking substantively of the political, I thus qualify both a mode of existence of common life and a form of collective action that is implicitly distinguished from the exercise of politics. To refer to the political and not to politics is to speak of the power of law, of the state and the nation, of equality and justice, of identity and difference, of citizenship and civility; in short of everything that constitutes the polis beyond the immediate field of party competition for the exercise of power, of everyday government action and the ordinary life of institutions". ROSANVALLON, *Por uma história do político...*, p. 73.

¹⁶ See: CONNELL, Charles. *Popular opinion in the Middle Ages*. Channeling public ideas and attitudes. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016.

secular or ecclesiastical. Emperors, kings, popes, bishops, and lords are primarily judges. It is up to them to say and do justice to their subjects. From this commutative and distributive capacity, which feeds the social networks led by the political head, public power is born. Thus, injustice corrupts the public good in a broad sense, but in the same context, and remarkably close to the current meaning of corruption, the word is clearly used to refer to the act of bribing judges, as can be seen in the “Ordenações Afonsinas” (15th century):

It does not seem to be a reasonable or honest thing for the Justices of our courts, and any other of our officials, who are entrusted by Us with judging or discharging anything - and for this reason they receive our maintenance, so that they can reasonably maintain their states, and among the good are more honourable than they would be if they did not have the said offices from Us — to **receive bribes [peitas] from the parties**, who expect discharges from them, and to give in return Sentences, and the discharges that the parties desire, **corrupting their offices**, and perverting Justice. For this reason, our Royal State will appear guilty before God, in disgrace, and even disgraced before the world, and will receive great harm as a result, something which every Prince should always greatly fear. For the said Royal Dignity has been received from God, and as his Vicar-Lieutenant he governs it, and the principle of it is based on the good governance of Justice, and he must use all his power so that it may be preserved by him.¹⁷

In the footsteps of the classical definition, which understood the corruption of public affairs as the private appropriation of social wealth, the words selfishness and avarice take centre stage. From a Christian perspective, such behaviours are harshly typified and penalized as deadly sins.

In any case, there is a medieval historical aspect that should not go unnoticed: the much broader and clearly stated nature of what corroded society and power, and to which the word "corruption" could be applied. Here is an excerpt from Rui de Pina's chronicle, written in Portugal at the end of the 15th century, in which King João II is warned about the error of receiving the Jews expelled from Spain in exchange for money:

¹⁷ “Não parece ser coisa razoável e honesta que os Desembargadores da nossa justiça, e quaisquer outros nossos oficiais, encarregados por Nós de julgar ou desembargar alguma coisa - e por isso recebem nosso mantimento, para que razoavelmente possam manter seus estados, e entre os bons são mais honrados do que seriam se de Nós não tivessem os ditos ofícios - **receberem peitas das partes**, que deles esperam haver desembargos, e darem em troca Sentenças, e os desembargos que as partes desejam, **corrompendo seus ofícios**, e pervertendo a Justiça. Por essa razão o nosso Real Estado diante de Deus parecerá culpado, em desmerecimento, e ainda diante do Mundo deslouvado, e receberá por isso grande prejuízo, coisa que todo Príncipe deve sempre muito recear. Pois a dita Real Dignidade recebeu de Deus, e como seu Vigário Lugar-tenente a governa, e o princípio dela se baseia na boa governança de Justiça, devendo empregar todo o seu poder para que seja por ele conservada”. *ORDENAÇÕES do Senhor Rey Dom Affonso V (Ordenações Afonsinas)*. Livro III. Título CXXVIII. Real Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1792 (fac-simile pela Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian). Available at: <http://www.ci.uc.pt/ihti/proj/afonsinas/pagini.htm>. Accessed: June 25, 2023.

And then some in whom there was clear judgment, and some **uncorrupted** passion, despising flattery, or fear, which guided others, substantially contradicted him, saying: "Sir, two excellent, and very praised things have always been heard in these Kingdoms of Portugal, because the Kings, and natives of them, in all the World over all, were honoured, and esteemed: The first was the firm loyalty of the Portuguese to their King; and the second, the complete faith and true love that their Kings, as very Catholic, always had and kept for God and his holy faith. The first, either through the faults of others, or through your own sins, has already been **corrupted** in your days, and in the time of your resignation through disloyalty; [...] because you do not enjoy the tranquillity, and security that your predecessors always enjoyed, you must report it more to misfortune, than to your own good fortune. [...] The second, which is the Christian faith, and which already remains, you should not want money, which is a vituperated greed, to extinguish and **corrupt** you first. And since in the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon your countrymen, not having such an ancient privilege of this cleanliness, the excellent Kings of them as Catholic Christians, after the natural upbringing that these infidels and heretics had in their Kingdoms, and despising such rich services, tributes, and servitude that they owed them, and always did, only by good example, and great purity of the Faith, as to enemies banish them, and cast them out of their lands; Your reason, honesty and conscience do not allow you to tie them up and gather them into your own, which contradicts everything else. And we do not know with what excuse, or just title, you can call yourselves Defender of the Faith, making of your Realms, and safe port to such enemies of it. [...] You know this is already such a certain disservice of yours as the other service of the Conquest of the Moors, it is very doubtful, being with such a torpid offer.¹⁸

The passage is incredibly significant in that the verb corrupt appears three times to condemn a situation in which money would corrupt the highest public authority in the kingdom: the monarch himself. If, on the one hand, the classification of corruption remains linked to the idea of corrosion, which, by affecting reason and faith, puts the "common good" at risk, on the other hand, the "so torpid an offer" extended to the

¹⁸ "E porem algũs em que avia juizo limpo, e d'algũa paixam **nom corruuto**, desprezando lisonjaria, ou temor, que a outros guiavam, substancialmente o contradisseram, dizendo: "Senhor, duas excelentes, e muy louvadas cousas ouve sempre nestes Regnos de Portugal, porque os Reys, e naturaes delles, em todo o Mundo sobre todos, foram honrados, e estimados: A primeira foy hũa firme lealdade dos Portugueses pera seu Rey; e a segunda, inteira fe, e verdadeiro amor, que os Reys delles, como muy Catholicos, a Deos, e a sua sancta Fe sempre tiveram, e guardaram. A primeira, ou por culpas alheas, ou por pecados proprios vossos, ja em vossos dias, e no tempo de vosso resignado por deslealdades primeiramente se **corrompeu**; [...] por nom gozardes da tranquillidade, e segurança que vossos antecessores sempre possoiram, mais o devees reportar a desaventura, que bem-aventurança vossa. [...] A segunda que he a Fe Christãa, e que ja soo fica, nom devees querer, que por dinheiro, em que parece, que entra vituperada cobyça, se apague, e **corrompa** primeiro em vos. E pois nos Regnos de Castella, e Aragam vossos Comarquãos, nom teendo tam antigo privilegio desta limpeza, os excelentes Reys delles como Catholicos Christãos, posposta a natural criaçam que estes infiees, e hereges em seus Regnos tiveram, e desprezando tam ricos serviços, tributos, e servidam que lhes deviam, e sempre fezeram, soo por bõo exemplo, e grande pureza da Fe, como a imiigos os desterrar, e lançam de suas terras; a razam, honestidade, nem consciencia vossa nom consente, que vos os emparees, e recolhaaes nas vossas, a que em tudo mais contradiz. E nom sabemos com que escusa, e justo titulo, vos poderees chamar Defensor da Fe, fazendo de vossos Regnos Couto, e seguro porto aos tam imiigos della. [...] Sabe este he ja tam certo desserviço seu como ho outro serviço da Conquista dos Mouros, he muy duvidoso, seendo principalmente com oferta tam torpe". PINA, Ruy de. *Crónica de El-Rei D. João II*. Coimbra: Atlântida, 1950, p. 179, emphasis mine.

king, mediated by money,¹⁹ puts us before a situation in which the ruler allows himself to be dragged down by “greed”. It seems clear that corruption is linked to actions that prevent the common good from being realized, of which the receipt of “undue” advantages by individuals who have public responsibilities is just one possibility. Therefore, the accusation makes clear the breadth of the semantic field of corruption, because the actions that can endanger the Christian model of society go far beyond the active or passive corruption of public officials, as it is understood today.

This scope requires reflection on the very definition of “public” in historical terms. The examples we have just given concern monarchical power, a dimension easily identified as “public”, due to some of the characteristics attributed to it that are close to those of the contemporary state. However, as already mentioned, if we consider “the public” from an aristocratic perspective and from the logic of legal pluralism, which underpinned the political model of Western Christianity, it will be necessary to broaden this public sphere. The church, especially in its higher social dimension, as the ecclesiastical aristocracy, is also the protagonist par excellence of public power. And as far as corruption is concerned, studying the way in which the institution has historically framed and dealt with issues affecting the appropriation and distribution of its wealth offers important results.

From exceedingly early on, the church dealt with the problem, identifying it as “simony”, but also using other words, such as “usurpation”, “embezzlement”, “dilapidation”.²⁰ Pope Gregory the Great (6th century) had already written in detail about simony as a crime/sin/heresy that affected not only the church's property, but the collective body of Christians, with serious implications for everyone's salvation.²¹ In the following centuries, the problem continued to be part of debates in both ecclesiastical and secular circles, highlighting the degree to which the two spheres were intertwined. Wealth and the “good” of the church were a matter for the aristocracy, which could not disregard its secular and ecclesiastical character. The disputes over the church's material and symbolic wealth involved confrontational

¹⁹ However, the presence of money in public life does not necessarily presuppose the existence of corruption and may even be considered desirable for the realization of the common good. See: ZELIZER, Viviana A. The Social Meaning of Money: "Special Monies". *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (Sep. 1989), p. 342-377.

²⁰ In the Frankish (Merovingian and Carolingian eras) and Visigothic kingdoms, it is possible to follow this intense complaint through the Council Acts and their respective canons.

²¹ WEST, Charles. Competing for the Holy Spirit: Humbert of Moyenmoutier and the question of simony. In: DEPREUX, Ph.; BOUGARD, F.; LE JAN, R. (ed.). *Compétition et Sacré au Haut Moyen Âge: entre méditation et exclusion*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015, p. 347-360; p. 357.

groups, socially made up of seculars and ecclesiastics on both sides. The legitimacy and virtue claimed by one of the parties was necessarily opposed through the simoniac classification attributed to the other. The 11th century, in this sense, is full of examples, involving the dispute over the papacy, as well as the right to investiture of bishops and the appointment of other ecclesiastical dignities. The cases have been extensively studied by historiography, but it is interesting to follow the renewal of interpretations, previously more linked to institutionalist visions and now more attentive to the complexity of the social relationships that shaped the political scenarios and the plasticity of the discourses mobilized in each situation. The atmosphere of “moral panic”²² that can be observed in the documentation of this period, in relation to simony, allows to explore the theme in various directions. One of the heralds of the “disgrace” that was befalling the church was Humberto da Silva Cândida, who, with his famous *Libri Tres Adversus Simoniacos*, accused various practices of powerful Christians in relation to church business, including donations. This is an important aspect for the study of corruption, especially given the importance that the gift economy acquired in pre-modern societies. The interpretation that the actors involved in these exchange relationships attributed to the act, as well as that of those evaluating them from the outside, were the fuel for the main controversies that agitated the period, and which turned into dramatic political disputes. Thus, in the words of Charles West,

Describing these men’s motives with a vocabulary of competition that included words such as *ambitio*, *supplantatio* and even *supereminare*, Humbert suggested that the gifts being exchanged were actually motivated by commercial interests, that people were being appointed not for the necessity of the church but because they had given or had promised to give money, and he drew on an imagery of merchants (*negotiatores*) to make the point clear. (...) As a consequence, viewed through Humbert’s eyes, solidarity-building gift-exchange is transmuted into potlatch, and flat-rate transactions become auctions; indeed, bishoprics themselves are more or less described as being acquired through competitive tendering.²³

The practices denounced as illicit — and even heretical — sought to target groups with projection within the church itself, for whom the exchange of gifts was certainly within traditional standards, the social norms in force. But the accusation, if

²² WEST, Charles. *Competing for the Holy Spirit...*, p. 356.

²³ WEST, Charles. *Competing for the Holy Spirit...*, p. 354-355.

successful, would put them outside the church guild. For Leandro Rust, “because they ascended to the episcopate for a price paid in money or favours, simoniacs are ‘external mediators’ of entirely secular negotiations; whoever sets a price for entry into the episcopal office not only sells an ecclesiastical good, but the Christian people themselves to the Devil”.²⁴ Humberto da Silva Cândida thus operates an effective shift in political terms. Simony functions here as a powerful element that reveals something that is hidden, which severely affects the public function of the church. For him, the one who buys and sells is just as sinful as the one who, from the heights of ecclesiastical authority, defends the “baleful” consequences of the practice. The latter is represented in the book by the character “Corruptor”. Leandro Rust believes he is Pedro Damiano.

The name corruptor was not just a nickname for Damian, but "the engine of the process by which the object of thought was thought²⁵ [in "Three Books"]": the corruption of the Church, of which simony was an emblem. This interpretation explains why this name appears as the beginning of Humberto's work, since it was the formal condition of an effect of meaning whose cause was based on a relationship that pre-existed the text: a recent and significant change in the institutional distribution of apostolic power or, in the light of the experience accumulated by a cardinal under Leo IX, the corruption of the papal government. [...] Far from being ancillary or dispensable, the figure of the corrupter meant that Silva Candida's response to the simoniacs, which had already been scrutinized by historians as a theological and *canonical* matter, was decisively political for his contemporaries within the Papacy.²⁶

The interrelationship between the choice of the word "corruptor" to classify an agent and the political consequences it is intended to provoke is notorious and opens promising methodological possibilities for historical research. At the same time, in addition to the political game involving the dispute for power, the very construction of the discourse required all those involved - author and readers - to have knowledge of the principles defended, as well as the political scenario.

²⁴ RUST, Leandro. *Homo Corruptus*: por uma história política de *Libri Tres Adversus Simoniacos* (c. 1058). *Antíteses*, Londrina, v.15, n. 29, p. 098-127, jan-jul. 2022, p.103-104.

²⁵ Leandro Rust draws on PÊCHEUX, Michel. *Semântica e discurso*. Campinas: Editora Unicamp, 2009, p. 93.

²⁶ “O nome corruptor não era apenas uma alcunha para Damiano, mas “o motor do processo pelo qual se pensava [em “Três Livros”] o objeto do pensamento”: a corrupção da Igreja, da qual a simonia era um emblema. Esta interpretação explica por que tal nome figura como o começo da obra de Humberto, pois era a condição formal de um efeito de sentido cuja causa se assentava em uma relação pré-existente ao texto: uma recente e expressiva alteração na distribuição institucional do poder apostólico ou, à luz da experiência acumulada por um cardeal de Leão IX, a corrupção do governo papal. [...] Longe de ser acessória ou dispensável, a figura do corruptor fez com que a resposta de Silva Cândida aos simoníacos, já tão vasculhada por historiadores e historiadoras como matéria teológica e canônica, fosse decisivamente política para seus contemporâneos no interior do Papado”. RUST, *Homo Corruptus...*, p. 114.

Another aspect of the accusations of simony that is important for studies on corruption is “the quality of the money”.²⁷ In principle, as Leandro Rust points out, scholars tend to expect that, in documentary records, the “destination of the money” is a formula for cleaning up a sinful/criminal origin by applying it to virtuous causes. However, depending on the political context, this was not always possible, as was shown in the case of the memoirs that were produced about Benedict IX —known as the most corrupt pope in history. In this case, the fact that he used the money he received from the Roman patriciate to repair churches was not enough to “cleanse” this wealth of the sin of simony, according to the versions produced by fornic groups that sought to dethrone the old lineages from St. Peter. The trajectory of Benedict IX, who was pontiff three times, is extremely complex and full of political “moves”, in which accusations of corruption play a fundamental role. It is a context that, as Leandro Rust has shown, provides plenty of material for understanding the intricate layers that make up the political conceptions and scenarios from which accusations of corruption in the Church emerge. However, as the author points out, more than mere accounting money, it is about power over the “set of rules” that operate (material and symbolic) wealth - in this case, the papacy.²⁸

It therefore seems very promising to study corruption through a semantic field, based on identifying the meanings and modulations that the problem acquires in different socio-historical contexts. The relationship between signs and what they designate is a useful methodological key offered by linguistics. Similarly, syntax and pragmatics are interesting tools. The former is a methodology that reveals the relationship between signs, whose varied combinations can reveal important political “moves”, due to the possibility of changing the meaning of words by combining them in diverse ways. The second makes it possible to understand the relationship between signs and their users, taking the researcher back to the heart of what should be the core of the construction of the object of study: the bundles of social relationships that are presented in documentary records, as a shared language, from which it is possible

²⁷ The monetary aspect often appears as a protagonist in corruption studies, understood as the means by which modernity has managed to make individuals more susceptible to corruption, since the spread of money has led to the fragmentation of old personal ties, now replaced by more circumstantial clientelist practices. This dynamization would have expanded the situations of corruption, which are much more “liquid” and atomized. For a critique of this interpretation, see: ZELIZER, Viviana. The Social Meaning of Money: “Special Monies”. *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 95, n. 2, 1989, p. 342-377.

²⁸ RUST, Leandro. *O homem que foi três vezes Papa*. Corrupção e poder na Idade Média. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2023, p. 85-92.

to risk a new “move”.²⁹ When an action is classified as corrupt, it means that it is socially generalizable.

Still within the scope of linguistics, corruption and its lexicon can be considered symptoms of the power relations that dispute control of the signifier, in other words, of statements and their compositions, such as forms. In other words, the meanings and contents are not fixed and offer the elasticity needed to translate the dynamism of social relations. What might previously have seemed to the researcher to be evidence of ambiguity and legal inconsistency is reconfigured as an instrument that, through deviation, exposes social relations. Once again, we emphasize the inappropriateness of reducing the documentary *corpus* to legislation, since corruption is a legally incomplete act that will only be fully constituted by social relations.³⁰

In terms of discourse, political metaphors are another important possibility to explore, as they are instruments that operate beliefs.³¹ As mentioned, the metaphorical strategies that operate the belief in the necessary superiority of an elite that seizes and redistributes social wealth are obviously of great interest, especially when it is possible to analyze the ways in which they are reaffirmed and transformed. The body is the primordial metaphor, from which others derive, such as corrosion, identified by a myriad of situations and negative actions that affect its functioning.

From a theoretical and methodological point of view, the main challenge lies precisely in this lexical and circumstantial breadth: not every deviation can be considered corruption, at the risk of losing its specificity. Methodologically, it is not easy to face up to the swamp of casuistry that shows conceptual imprecision, a difficulty in applying the laws, a lack of effectiveness on the part of authority. Accusations and cases have been repeated for centuries. In terms of the work plan, it is still necessary to explore the path of identification, by means of a dense description in which we discover lexicon, meanings/signifiers; syntax; pragmatics; semantics (enunciations). But, once again, this task needs to be deeply attentive to the social relations that justify the elaboration of the discourses analysed, as well as to other norms that bound and ordered society. From the historical examples we have

²⁹ POCOCK, J. G. A. *Linguagens do ideário político*. São Paulo: EdUSP, 2003.

³⁰ This perception is fundamental to understanding the extent of multinormativity.

³¹ "Metaphors, more than figures of speech, are belief operators that make the premises and meanings of an original semantic field colonize other symbolic domains and thus configure a space in which meanings can be produced". LESSA, Renato. Política: anamnese, amnésia, transfigurações. In: NOVAES, Aauto (Org.). *O esquecimento da política*. Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 2007, p. 108.

presented, both in the context of the monarchy and the church, it should be noted that corruption is not merely the opposite of virtue. Corruption is a singular opposite of virtue, which only acquires this form of corrosion through the denunciation and negative classification that social agents will make of certain behaviours in the political arena, attributed to other social agents. However, from a methodological point of view, we should not overlook the scenario in which the competition for the common good (material and symbolic) takes place, from which the identification and accusation of practices as “corrupt” strategically originate.

V.

As mentioned above, pre-modern societies produced anti-corruption laws and regulations that distinguished between public and private, although logically the elements that make up the equation were today understood in an unusual way. At the same time, social expectations regarding the effectiveness of the war on corruption were not limited to legislative instruments produced by the monarchy or the church. The very multinormative nature of these societies shows how anachronistic this perception is. Thus, historiographical interpretations that focus solely on the anti-corruption legislative capacities of authorities with a state bias are not very effective, as can be seen in studies that tend to promote centralist perspectives. In other words, approaches that believe that the more power was centralized in the hands of the monarch, the greater the chances of having a bureaucratic apparatus capable of operating the necessary separation between public and private and thus reducing corruption. The problem with this perspective lies, as we have already pointed out, in the anachronistic way in which the strengthening of pre-modern public powers is confused with the monopolistic form of the contemporary state, and the ease with which the state bureaucratic apparatus is associated with a supposed technical neutrality capable of removing private interests from the public sphere by its mere existence. This way of considering the problem means adopting the ideological lens of the contemporary state, which does not serve as an analytical tool for the present, nor for the past.

The political and social model is the key to accessing the problem of corruption. It is based on the logic of appropriation and distribution of common wealth (good) that accusations of corruption materialize. The political game is the visible scene, easily

accessible to scholars, but it hides the backstage, where the fundamentals lie. Without forgetting what is at stake, it will be possible to try to recompose the social norms that form the consensus around the appropriation and distribution of wealth. In terms of the concept, concrete cases allow us to say that it is permanently disputed, which means that corruption does not occur in the abstract. It is about the power to re-signify a concrete act, the power to classify an action.

Regarding to the present day and everything that has been said so far about corruption, it does not seem possible to really understand the problem without considering aspects of the political model and the game of politics. In terms of definition, the classical view of corruption has not disappeared, alternating with the modern one. In fact, it gives density to the modern one. The metaphor of corrosion lives on, allowing us to dramatically condemn individual conduct that undermines the democratic rule of law. Morality therefore remains a determining factor in the problem. At the same time, by confining corruption to legal provisions, the scope for corrupt acts has been reduced under the apparent stability and predictability of the law. What is not provided for by law is not corruption.

The typification of corruption, which focuses on actions involving civil servants and political representatives, takes the focus away from acts that undermine the common good of democratic society, which occur, for example, in the economic and business spheres. It is worth looking at some excerpts from the testimony of a Brazilian banker:

“The most important thing in law is to know the intricacies of the Gray line between legal and illegal. My job is to expand the margin of legality as much as possible in the service of the bank's interests. [...] Our team has more than twenty hand-picked and well-paid lawyers. [...] I make contacts with judges, politicians and journalists and look after foreign clients. [...] People are bought with cash and deposits in tax havens created for this purpose. We know how to do it right. Without leaving a trace. The city [São Paulo] is all bought, make no mistake, every public tender and every lucrative deal, without exception, is shared out and negotiated. [...] For each type of client and people there is a more convenient way of buying without looking like you are buying. [...] The gold mine of any commercial or investment bank is the Central Bank. Only our people go in there. And the country is run from the Central Bank, which decides everything important in the economy. That is where the Gray area between legality and illegality defines everyone's life. [...] We can do any kind of speculation with the exchange rate, like currency swaps, for example. If it goes wrong, the Central Bank covers the loss. There is no better deal. If it goes wrong, the famous Treasury foots the bill. We are the ones who control the entire economy, and in our favour, Congress does not even have a say in this. [...] Of course, everything is justified as a

mechanism to combat inflation, and not to enrich the rich. For those who see it working from the inside, as in my case, it's kind of funny.”³²

The separation between politics and economics advocated by the capitalist system conveniently prevents society from understanding the real mechanisms of wealth production and redistribution. The economy remains in the shadow of politics, with the latter taking the lead in both good and bad actions. This separation, however, is mere ideology. Both aspects are intrinsic to the architecture of the political model - inseparable - with consequences that feedback on each other since they are opaque to most of society. Once the disguise has been lifted, about corruption, it is possible to glimpse a complex and imprecise panorama, remarkably similar to that attributed to pre-modern societies. Although today we have categorical definitions and prescriptions, judicial and legal procedures offer truly diverse interpretative possibilities, generating a sense of ambiguity and laxity about the application and enforcement of laws. The fundamental contemporary differences lie on the one hand, in the desire to define the problem more precisely and, on the other, in the drastic reduction of the social environments in which corruption is recognized as occurring. In pre-modern societies, however, what may seem imprecise today was only the elasticity needed to treat behaviour classified as deviant and, regarding the scope of corruption, it was understood that it affected many more aspects of life in society. In any case, despite its breadth, actions, and actors whose characteristics coincide exactly with what our laws classify as corruption were also frequently condemned. But yesterday, as today, when corruption emerges and denouncement thrives, it means that, in terms of the political model and the political game, a social consensus has been broken.

³² “O mais importante no Direito é conhecer os meandros da linha cinzenta entre o legal e o ilegal. Meu trabalho é expandir ao máximo a margem da legalidade a serviço dos interesses do banco. [...] Nossa equipe tem mais de vinte advogados escolhidos a dedo e bem pagos. [...] Eu faço os contatos com juízes, políticos e jornalistas e cuido dos clientes estrangeiros. [...] As pessoas são compradas com dinheiro vivo e com depósitos em paraísos fiscais criados para isso. A gente sabe fazer bem feito. Sem deixar rastro. A cidade [São Paulo] é toda comprada, não se iluda, toda licitação pública e todo negócio lucrativo, sem exceção, é repartido e negociado. [...] Para cada tipo de cliente e de gente existe um jeito mais conveniente de comprar sem parecer que está comprando. [...] A mina de ouro de qualquer banco comercial ou de investimento é o Banco Central. Ali só entra gente nossa. E o país é gerido a partir do Banco Central, que decide tudo de importante na economia. É lá que a zona cinzenta entre legalidade e ilegalidade define a vida de todos. Isso não aparece em nenhum jornal. [...] Podemos fazer qualquer tipo de especulação com o câmbio, como nos *swaps* cambiais, por exemplo. Se der errado, o Banco Central cobre o prejuízo. Não existe negócio melhor. Se der errado, o famoso Erário paga a conta. Quem controla toda a economia somos nós e a nosso favor, o Congresso nem apita sobre isso. [...] Claro que tudo é justificado como mecanismo de combate à inflação, e não para enriquecer os ricos. Para quem vê isso funcionar a partir de dentro, como no meu caso, é até engraçado”. SOUZA, Jessé. *A classe média no espelho*. Sua história, seus sonhos e ilusões, sua realidade. Rio de Janeiro: Estação Brasil, 2018, p. 170-172.

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