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The Laughing Matter of Corruption and Anti-Corruption: Theoretical Foundations**

Corruption is rightly seen as a very serious problem. However, this paper argues that we should also pay attention to humour and laughter both for understanding their role in the normalization and de-normalization of organizational corruption, as well as for developing anti-corruption strategies based on humour and laughter. A theoretical framework based on superiority theories, incongruity theories, relief theories, and transgression theories of humour are presented to study the role of humour in organizational corruption and if humour could be relevant for anti- corruption.

Keywords: Humour, Laughter, Jokes, Corruption, Anti-Corruption

Die lachende Sache der Korruption und Anti-Korruption – Theoretische Grundlagen

Korruption gilt – zurecht – als ein schwerwiegendes Problem. Es führt zu negativen Effekten, die von geringem ökonomischem Wachstum bis hin zu Desillusion und Verlust an Glauben in die Zukunft reichen. Obwohl es einen öffentlichen Diskurs über Humor in der Korruption gibt, wird dieser in der akademischen Forschung ignoriert. Das vorliegende Positionspapier tritt dafür ein, dass wir offen sein sollten für Humor und Lachen, nicht nur, um deren Rolle für die Normalisierung und Denormalisierung von organisationaler Korruption zu verstehen, sondern auch, um Anti-Korruptionsstrategien basierend auf Humor und Witz zu entwickeln. Hierzu bedarf es eines theoretischen Rahmens, den ich im Folgenden entwickeln möchte. Ich verwende vier Theorien des Humors – Überlegenheitstheorien, Inkongruenztheorien, Relieftheorien und Theorien der Transgression – um Ideen über die Rolle zu entwickeln, die Humor in organisationaler Korruption spielt, und um zu fragen, welche Art von Humor für die Bekämpfung von Korruption relevant sein könnte. Dieses Papier eröffnet somit neue Wege für deskriptive Studien und normative Projekte.

Schlagwörter: Humor, Lachen, Witze, Korruption, Anti-Korruption

1. Dual Discourses: Corruption as A Fundamental Evil and A Laughing Matter

»Corruption is the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development around the world« (United Against Corruption, 2017). This is how the United Nations campaign *United against Corruption* starts its factsheet on the detrimental effects of corrupt practices. An expert of corruption and bribery, John T. Noo-

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nan, further describes how corruption in form of bribery plays a particularly salient facilitating role for almost all evils, stating that »the reduction, if not the elimination, of bribery may be the key to reducing each of the other evils« (Noonan 2004: 235). Furthermore, academic research shows that corruption hinders development (c.f. Gould/Amaro-Reyes 1983, Schleifer/Vishny 1993) and lowers investment and growth (c.f. Mauro 1995). Furthermore, corruption is argued to decrease public revenue, increase public spending, poverty and inequalities, as well as to distort markets, resource allocations and incentives (c.f. Tanzi 1998). The general assessment is that corruption is seen as a serious issue, and rightly so. Also, most anti-corruption strategies are expected to proceed in a serious manner emphasising integrity and transparency as well as correcting potential incentive structures which can lead to corruption (c.f. Rose-Ackerman/Søreide 2011, Ashforth /Anand 2003). To sum up, corruption is a serious evil on which a »war« is waged (c.f. Lennerfors 2008).

This is the story that all corruption scholars and anti-corruption practitioners know from academic papers and policy papers on corruption. However, at the same time, there is a more frivolous corruption discourse consisting of jokes, stories, and comical depictions. Perhaps the most well-known corruption joke concerns corruption in different countries. In this rendering the comparison is made between Kenya and Italy, but the joke exists with other nationalities in other settings as well. Here goes: A Kenyan minister was invited to Italy. His Italian counterpart took him on a tour in the city. He observed that most Italians live in small apartments. Later, he was invited to lunch with the Italian minister and was awed to see his spacious villa. »How could you afford this on your salary?«, he asked. The Italian told him to look out the window. »Do you see that bridge?«, he whispered. »I got 10 percent commission on the project.« Years later, favours were returned and the Italian went to see his Kenyan friend. On a city tour he noted that many people lived in shantytowns, if they were not homeless. However, the minister's home was a palace. He couldn't resist asking why. The Kenyan minister didn't need to whisper what is common knowledge. Do you see that bridge? He asked proudly. The Italian couldn't see anything. »Of course,« the Kenyan explained, »I took 100 percent commission on it!« (Slightly adapted from Fropper 2005.) A similar joke concerning a highway rather than a bridge is published in the Economist (2013) – perhaps one of the most serious weekly magazines on economic matters. Humour about corruption indeed has a foothold in the public realm.

This paper proceeds to argue that an aspect that is largely missing in the academic debate on corruption and anti-corruption is a focus on humour and laughter. There are probably several factors that explain why academic papers have not focused explicitly on humour and laughter related to corruption and anti-corruption. First of all, one could consider such projects to be utterly immoral, since talking about people's misfortunes in unserious ways is illegitimate. But David Benatar (2017) argues that humour is indeed serious: »It is often the case that when people joke about [disease, disability and death, for example] it is not because they are failing to take them seriously, but instead precisely because they

do take them so seriously« (Benatar 2017: 30). Swedish economic philosopher Claes Gustafsson (2012) furthermore argues that in the field of business and organization studies (and one might add corruption studies) one is engaged in the »production of seriousness«. This means that we study the legitimate industries, businesses, and organizational phenomena in legitimate ways. This could be called the seriousness bias, a bias which could make us blind to some important, but seemingly less serious phenomena, and could make us avoid using approaches that seem unserious. From that perspective, it would be a seriousness bias to only study the serious side of corruption in a seemingly serious way. Rather, one should open up to studying corruption also from this more light-hearted and creative perspective, if it has some potential relevance.

Second, one might think that humour and laughter do not have any impact on corruption and anti-corruption, and that it is therefore not worth studying. However, as we know from research on humour in organizations (for up-to-date overviews, see for example Huber/Brown 2016 and Jarzabkowski/Lê 2017), humour does indeed play a role, and it would therefore be of interest to study and analyse what role it could play in relation to corruption and anti-corruption. Furthermore, one could even imagine that humour and laughter could be helpful for fighting corruption – this would be a more normative perspective. Following this latter line of reasoning, Francisco Claver (2009) asked: »Is it possible for us to think of humour not just as a mechanism to cope with the evils corruption brings in its wake but for something more drastic — to imaginatively, creatively use humour as a means of purging the body politic of the poison that it is?«

The paper thus holds that one should study humour and laughter in matters related to corruption descriptively and normatively. For both these endeavours there is a need for a theorization of humour and laughter, and the purpose of the paper is to introduce such a framework and discuss its impact both on the descriptive and normative projects. I will draw on a broad, philosophical perspective on humour and laughter since I believe that it accurately describes various types of humour. Furthermore, this theoretical perspective is underlying the research on humour in organizations (c.f. Jarzabkowski/Lê 2017). This paper is thus a position paper that connects broad, philosophical humour theory with corruption and anti-corruption studies. In-depth empirical investigations or fully developed humour-based anti-corruption strategies will not be found in this paper, but is a task for future studies. In this paper, I merely lay the groundwork for such future approaches.

This paper is situated within a project which aims at problematizing current ways of understanding and combating corruption, by means of creative engagement with theory. This project goes in line with the research direction of a recent special issue on future avenues of corruption research edited by Breit et al. (2015). Breit et al. (2015) argue that a creative engagement with theorizing corruption could lead to constructing alternative understandings of corruption as well as being able to devise strategies to fight it. In this paper, I hold that an engagement with theories of humour and laughter can give an alternative, cre-

ative understanding of corruption and anti-corruption, which could not only have descriptive, but also normative, potential.

This paper thus goes beyond the established theoretical approaches. At present, some theoretical strands have focused on discussing opportunistic behaviour based on rational choice and agency theory, and thus on the individual's motivations for engaging in corrupt behaviour (c.f. Rose-Ackerman/Søreide 2011). In other strands, corruption is seen as stemming from the design of the system – that organizational and institutional structures give rise to or stifle corrupt behaviour (c.f. Heidenheimer et al. 1989, Johnston 2005, Lambsdorff 2007). Although simplified, these two research directions have given rise to a focus on either agency or structure when understanding and fighting corruption. In contrast, this paper builds on organizational understandings of corruption which explains corruption as a process of normalization, including socialization, institutionalization, and rationalization (c.f. Ashforth/Anand 2003), which I will return to shortly. These processual theories of corruption will serve as a backdrop to my perspective on humour and laughter.

In the second section, I describe processual theories of organizational corruption. In the third section I review broad, philosophical theories of humour and laughter. In the fourth section, I discuss the potential role of humour and laughter related to corruption and anti-corruption more generally and organizational theories of corruption and anti-corruption more specifically. The fifth section is a concluding discussion.

2. Organizational Theories of Corruption

Ashforth and Anand (2003) is a seminal article on organizational corruption and although the authors have written articles on corruption since (c.f. Anand et al. 2004, Ashfort et al. 2008), the article stands as a dominant and productive way in which organizational corruption could be understood. The article explores how corrupt practices are normalized in organizations, stating that there are three processes that together lead to normalization: institutionalization (where corrupt practices become routine), rationalization (that corrupt actors rationalize their corrupt actions as legitimate actions) and socialization (where new people are educated in corrupt practices). In order to understand the role of humour and laughter for corruption and anti-corruption there is a need to present Ashforth and Anand's framework.[1]

Institutionalization consists of three phases. In the first phase, there is a decision to do something corrupt, which may stem from self-interest, or dissatisfaction with laws and policies. The action can also be a happenstance, an unintentional form of corruption. In the second phase, corrupt actions are embedded in the path dependence of the organization and in its organizational memory. The argument is that where corruption has already happened, it can more easily happen

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1 I have written similar overviews in Lennerfors 2017 and Lennerfors 2018 forthcoming.

again. In the third phase, the corrupt actions have become part of routines. Corrupt actions are becoming what must be done – the authors claim that corruption becomes normative. By repeatedly engaging in corrupt actions, people become desensitized and feel no moral aversion to the actions. In addition, they become mindless and unreflective of what they do.

When it comes to rationalization of corruption, Ashforth and Anand (2003) draw on the work by Sykes and Matza (1957). They claim that individuals engaging in corrupt practices can rationalize their actions in various ways: Legality, where an argument could be »what I do is not illegal«. Denial of responsibility, where you claim that you had no choice, therefore, you had to commit a corrupt act. Denial of injury, where you claim that there was no major damage stemming from this act. Denial of victim, which can concern a form of vengeance – harm the one who harmed you, that the other party volunteered, or depersonalisation, where the victim is not seen as worthy of being treated well. The fifth form, social weighting, states that a corrupt person may think that a law is arbitrary, irrelevant, etc. Appeal to higher loyalties could mean that group loyalty or corporate profitability is seen as the more important universal norm, and thus you can legitimize corrupt actions. The seventh form, metaphor of the ledger means that »I have done very good things for the organization and therefore I'm worth this«, like putting good and bad things on a ledger. Finally, refocusing attention means that one focuses on the positive things that one has done instead of those related to corruption.

The socialization of corruption is the third pillar of Ashforth and Anand's theory. They explain how newcomers are socialized into corruption. Newcomers could be coopted into corruption, where they are induced by rewards to skew their attitudes if not their self-conceptions toward certain corrupt behaviour. It can be difficult to even notice that one's interests have been skewed. Incrementalism, the slippery slope, means that each act justifies another more corrupt act. The corrupt agents become desensitized and what was once considered to be corrupt becomes normal, even desired, practice. The third form of socialization is compromise, where individuals fall back into corruption by means of resolving some conflict.

Institutionalization, rationalization and socialization together form what Ashforth and Anand (2003) call the normalization of corruption. To fight corruption one must therefore *de-normalize* corruption (c.f. Lennerfors 2018 forthcoming). This can be very difficult, the authors argue. When corruption is normalized, it can sometimes not be perceived. Also, whistle-blowing, which is definitely one way to de-normalize corruption, is a very risky business. Ashforth and Anand (2003) claim that there is often a need for a strong shock to fight corruption – for example external media coverage. But since weeding out corruption is complex, the authors suggest five forms of prevention that should be used. First, ethical values and awareness should be inculcated. Second, individuals should know that they will be accountable for their acts. Third, individuals should have access to confidential ethics officers for advice. Fourth, organizational practices should be more transparent. Fifth, the control should be equitable to avoid informer cul-

tures or too extensive control which could make individuals turn against the organization.

Some later theories on organizational corruption have followed the processual view, for example Nieuwenboer and Kaptein (2008) and Fleming and Zyglidopoulos (2009). Nieuwenboer and Kaptain (2008) describe how corruption is caused by several spirals; a spiral of divergent norms, where groups can develop standards that radically differ from social norms; a spiral of pressures, where increasing pressure to deliver results can lead to more corruption; a spiral of opportunity, where there is no risk of punishment which could lead to more corrupt acts being committed. Fleming and Zyglidopoulos (2009) describe how corruption has been dealt with in organizational theory and they have attempted to elaborate a theory of how corruption spreads from being marginal phenomena to being wide-spread in organizations. With their critical view, they are able to successfully identify a wide range of factors which together can lead to a processual view on corruption.

Given this theorizing of corruption and anti-corruption, it seems reasonable to assume that humour can play different roles. On the one hand, humour can assist in the normalizing of corruption and on the other it can contribute to de-normalizing corruption. In the reviewed research, Fleming and Zyglidopoulos describe how jokes can normalize corruption, in other words, lead to an acceptance and subsequent spread of corruption. Fleming and Zyglidopoulos, in passing, draw on the example of Enron traders and mention jokes that are »chilling in their sheer malice« (Fleming/Zyglidopoulos 2009: 24). This goes in line with Felices-Luna (2016) who argues that jokes are a way to rationalize corruption. One could also speculate, even though this is not covered by existing research, that jokes could be a way to introduce shocks into the organization. Shocks are, as we remember, something that Ashforth and Anand see as important for cleansing a corrupt organization. I will later return to these theories and argue that some forms of humour and laughter could work as forms of micro-shocks which together with other forms of anti-corruption measures can either keep the organization in order or fight existing cases of corruption.

Given this theoretical framework, we can hypothesise that humour can play a normalizing or de-normalizing role in organizations. But what kind of humour? To answer that question, we turn to theories of humour.

3. Theories of Humour and Laughter

In this section, which surveys theories of humour and laughter, I draw significantly on the work of John Morreall (1986, 2009) who for several decades has been interested in theorizing humour and laughter.[2] Morreall's work is philosophical and I have decided to draw on his work both because it provides an accurate

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2 This is a developed and updated version of a section of a conference paper about the role of humour and laughter in computer games (c.f. Dymek/Lennerfors 2005).

overview of theories of humour, and because it incidentally could lead to productive connections between corruption studies and philosophy which could stimulate theory development of corruption studies. Although Morreall's work is philosophical, organizational scholars Jarzabkowski and Lê (2017) argue that these are the main building blocks in organizational theories on humour. Morreall (1986, 2009) distinguishes three major theoretical strands of humour and laughter.

The first one is the superiority theory, which is also called the phthonic theory of humour. It posits laughter as a malicious expression of hate, contempt or condescension with regard to the one who is laughed about (c.f. Hobbes 1999 [1640], Plato 1992). This places humour and laughter in a quite negative light, and a counter-argument is that we often laugh with no such derogatory motivations. Morreall (2009) argues that we can either reject the theory or try to save it by following Henri Bergson's work. For Bergson,

> »the essence of the ridiculous is »mechanical inelasticity« – someone acting in a rigid, repetitive way instead of a flexible, context-sensitive way. When we laugh at persons who are acting like machines, we do feel superior to them, and we are humiliating them, but that humiliation spurs them to think and act more flexibly, less like a machine. So, while laughter stings, it brings the ridiculed person back to acting like a human being« (in Morreall 2009: 8).

The superiority theory could thus be expanded by means of a shift from laughing maliciously at a particular person, to laughing and feeling superior to the way the person acts, since the person is less than human.

The second theoretical strand sees humour as a reaction to some incongruity, hence by Morreall denominated the incongruity theory (c.f. Aristotle 1926, Hutcheson 1971 [1750], Kant 1987 [1790]; Schopenhauer 1969 [1818/19]). Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* (1926) claims that the incongruity in question regards setting up a certain expectation in the public and then jolting them with something they did not expect. For Hutcheson, incongruities are rather concentrated around the play of inappropriate metaphors or ideas that clash with each other (c.f. Hutcheson 1971 [1750]). Kant (1987 [1790]) saw humour as the evaporation of an expectation. Schopenhauer (1969 [1818/19]) discusses humour as expressing a conflict or incongruity between abstract concepts and sense perception.

The third strand is called the relief theory, which focuses on the superfluous nervous energy that is relieved from the human body when laughing (c.f. Freud 2003 [1905]; Santayana 1955; Spencer 1977 [1919]). Morreall (2009) explains that »laughter, and by implication humor, are not anti-social or irrational, but simply a way of discharging nervous energy found to be unnecessary«. As John Dewey put the idea, laughter »marks the ending (…) of a period of suspense, or expectation« (Morreall 2009: 17). Furthermore, George Santayana, for example, claimed that it is not the incongruity in itself that we're enjoying but the stimulation and shaking up of our wits:

> »We have a prosaic background of common sense and everyday reality; upon this background an unexpected idea suddenly impinges. But the thing is a futility. The comic accident falsifies the nature before us, starts a wrong analogy in the mind, a suggestion that cannot be carried out. In a word, we are in the presence of an absurdity, and man, being a rational animal, can like absurdity no better than he can like hunger or cold« (Santayana quoted in Morreall 2009: 14).

To complement Morreall's approach, I will invoke the work of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (1988), who distinguishes cynical from kynical laughter. The reasons why Sloterdijk is incorporated in the analysis is that Morreall (2009) disregards this fruitful perspective on humour and that humour, which can be understood from Sloterdijk's theories, is used in fighting corruption. Cynical laughter was the moderate laughter of the upper social classes who found the distinction between official ideology and practice a matter of enjoyment. They could preach water while drinking wine. On the contrary, the kynic, personified by Diogenes, engaged in a bodily critique of the ruling ideology. But rather than using discourse, he went around naked in public places, even engaging in morally, and hygienically, problematic actions in public. Sloterdijk calls the language of Diogenes the »language of the clown«. He argues that the demonstration of the kynical argument will evoke laughter and, suggests this form of critique as potentially powerful. A recent interpretation of Sloterdijk's work from the perspective of humour theory is that cynicism is the belief that there is no hope for change, while kynicism maintains that there is hope but that regular forms of critique can fall short, and more radical forms of critique are needed (c.f. Higgie, 2014). In the field of organization studies, Huber and Brown (2016) argue that there have been arguments both claiming that humour could have a subversive role, as well as that it might be mostly concerned with venting superfluous energies. I will call these kynical strategies »transgressive«.

Now, I have reviewed both organizational theories of corruption and theories of humour and laughter. In the next section I will tease out the connections between them.

4. Humour And Laughter in Processes of Corruption: Descriptive and Normative Avenues

In this section, I connect humour and laughter to corruption more generally and also to organizational theories of corruption more specifically. Regarding the organizational perspective, my main interlocutor will be Ashforth and Anand's 2003 article. Alongside with the anti-corruption measures described by Ashforth and Anand, namely inculcating ethical values and awareness, that individuals should be aware of their accountability, that individuals should have access to ethics officers, that organizational practices should be more transparent, and that control should be equitable, I maintain, given the above analysis, that humour and laughter could both normalize and de-normalize processes of corruption. However, by dividing humour into four different categories as is done in the theoretical framework, we can more clearly understand what kinds of humour could normalize and de-normalize corruption.

4.1 Superiority Theory

According to the superiority theory, laughter is malicious, derogatory, or at least teasing the person who is laughed at. One could easily imagine jokes, pun, and

bon mots, about corrupt individuals with this intention in mind. Humour based on superiority theory is positioning the ones *who are joking* above the ones *who are joked about*. For example, the joke about the Italian and the Kenyan in the introduction could be seen as one of cultural superiority, not only that Italians are superior to Kenyans, since they have less corruption, but also the cultural superiority of the person telling the joke, who is often not from either Italy nor Kenya. In that sense, it contributes to identity formation in organizations, which is a function that humour is seen to have in organizations (c.f. Huber/Brown 2016). Corruption humour can both be jokes about those who are corrupt and jokes about those who engage in anti-corruption. Humour about those who are corrupt externalizes corruption and builds an identity of »us« being not corrupt (similar to the Kenya-Italy joke). If it coincides with an awareness of the risks of corruption ›here, not there‹, it is possible that such humour could contribute to the denormalization of corruption. But on the other hand, such jokes could be part of rationalization processes, since the humour allows us to think that corruption is always ›elsewhere‹ and ›not here‹ and therefore not be aware of the risks ›here‹. Such jokes could thus contribute to creating a mindlessness about issues relating to corruption, which perhaps does not cause institutionalization and socialization of corruption, but still does not do anything to stop such processes. Adopting a Bergsonian take of superiority theory, where one laughs at the *mechanical* behaviour of someone, we could laugh at some people who are leaning towards corruption since they are bound by their self-serving nature. For example, I once heard such as joke during an empirical study: »The boss always gets treated to lunch by suppliers.« One could thus expect what the boss would do: If he's not in the office, he's probably at lunch with suppliers. According to the theory, by laughing and making jokes about those who are leaning towards corruption (when they are present), they could potentially see this as a jolt to ›come back‹ and stop engaging in corruption.

One can also imagine humour about those who are not corrupt – for example when some people joke about those who do not dare to be invited even to a glass of water or cup of coffee because of the risks of corruption. Once again, there is a form of superiority theory at work, since those who joke about this see themselves as superior to those anti-corruption absolutists. They see themselves as superior because they themselves have high integrity, can make judgments in every situation, and are not corrupted even though they sometimes receive gifts of various kinds. Such humour could contribute to the rationalization, socialization, and institutionalization of corruption, since it could allow for the existence of some quasi-corrupt practices as long as they do not influence the persons joking. But perhaps it is an illusion to think that one is not influenced, so such jokes could also create a false sense of security. One could take a Bergsonian perspective on these jokes as well since adhering to bureaucratic rules, which for some is the opposite of corruption, can also be seen as a machine-like behaviour (Berking 1999), leading to employees becoming like robots at work. Bureaucracy could therefore be seen as decreasing ethical demands to rules which, as Adorno (1973: 30) puts it, »robots can learn and copy.« As a final note, is possible that jokes

about those who are not corrupt could make them re-think their position and slide into corruption (»I don't want to be joked about, so maybe I should loosen up a bit and accept some Christmas gifts from our suppliers«).

To sum up, superiority theory builds on and re-creates social stratification. If the humour is about the corrupt ›somewhere else‹, it could contribute to de-normalize corruption, as long as it does not lead to a false sense of security. If the humour is about the corrupt ›here‹, it could potentially jolt them out of corruption, but at the same time it could contribute to stratification and build subcultures of corrupt groups in the organization. Jokes about those who are anti-corruption absolutists, could on the one hand strengthen the importance of judgment rather than mere rule-following, but it could also lead to a false sense of security. Furthermore, it could jolt the rule-followers to slide into corruption.

4.2 Incongruity Theory

The incongruity theory locates humour and laughter in various kinds of incongruities, jolting the listeners with something they did not expect, clashing incommensurable ideas, or an expectation evaporating. One could for example play on the corruption joke from the introduction. When the Italian comes to see the Kenyan in his magnificent villa and the Kenyan points towards the bridge, the story could end like this: And then the Italian saw a fine-looking bridge, and turned to the Kenyan, who proudly stated: »I was able to lead the project of building that high-quality bridge. As a project manager in the construction project I was handsomely rewarded and in addition to mortgages I've taken I could afford to build this house.« Depending on one's stereotypical expectations or if one had heard the corruption joke before, one could find this funny. This could lead to a revaluing of one's cultural stereotypes regarding corruption. If one expected the Kenyan to be utterly corrupt, this joke could make one reflect upon the cultural stereotypes and potentially revalue them. This would be a jolt that could be used, for fighting stereotypes about corruption, which could be important in fighting corruption itself.

Another well-known corruption joke concerns a trial where the prosecutor, naturally, wants to receive a favourable verdict. He therefore sends a nice present to the judge. His client nervously asks him: »will it work?«. »Sure«, the prosecutor said, »I wrote that the gift was from the defending lawyer«. This corruption joke also functions according to the incongruity theory. We might expect that the gift was sent as a bribe for preferential treatment, but the prosecutor knew that judges don't view gifts favourably and therefore sent it on behalf of his opponent. Such forms of humour could jolt listeners out of potential convictions that judges are susceptible to corruption. It could therefore promote trust in the judiciary system.

Yet, another corruption joke functions along the logic on incongruity. This joke is used by Transparency International in their anti-corruption measures directed to children. Here goes: »One day a professor was giving a big test to his students. He handed out all of the test papers and went back to his desk to wait. Once the

test was over, the students all handed the tests back in. The Professor noticed that one of the students had attached a one hundred-dollar bill to his test with a note saying ›A dollar per point‹. The next class the professor handed the tests back out. The student got back his test and 64 dollar« (Transparency International 2004). Once again incongruity is operational. We might have thought that the student would be rewarded with 100 points because of his one hundred-dollar bill and the statement ›a dollar per point‹. Or potentially, that the professor would report the student for trying to bribe him. Rather, the professor corrects the exam according to rules, giving the student 36 points, takes 36 dollars, and gives the rest back in change. This incongruity could make us reflect upon the situation, how we possibly imagine various ways in which the professor could have responded to the situation – but where the given response was maybe the least likely.

Humour and laughter based on the incongruity theory turn our expectations upside down, and thus play with our conceptions about corruption and anti-corruption. In the organizational context, it is likely that such kind of humour could serve as micro-shocks that de-normalize corruption. Related to institutionalization, rather than that only corrupt acts become part of the organizational memory or the organizational culture, humour about corruption can also enter into the organizational memory and culture, and thereby function as an ongoing critique of corruption. By including incongruent jokes that provide a constant jolting in the organization memory corrupt practices could possibly not escalate. The reason why they can have this potential is because they can induce reflection, rather than, as Ashforth and Anand (2003) state, create an organizational situation of mindlessness. Humour and laughter can also work as a form of de-rationalization. Rationalization is a way for organizational members to make sense of their corruption, while humour and laughter is, similarly to the discussion above, introducing a questioning of whether these ways of rationalizing are legitimate. Here, the incongruity theories provide most potential as they explicitly play with our expectations, common sense, and stereotypes. By turning common rationalizations around playfully, they could lead us to stop using them and thus make us need to re-evaluate our rationalization of corrupt practices.

4.3 Relief Theory

The third theoretical strand is, as mentioned above, relief theory, which focuses on laughter as the relief of superfluous nervous energy. Related to corruption, I argue that the relief theory can make one cope with the corruption in one's organization. Working or living in a corrupt environment can put great pressure on individuals, who feel disillusioned and lack a belief in the future. Corruption, as Weber and Getz have it, tends »to spread, infecting whole societies with moral decay and fatalism and resulting in hopelessness and inaction« (Weber/Getz 2004: 698). The theory does explain the alleviating role of humour to cope with a hopeless situation, ameliorating mental health, although one perceives that one works or lives in a corrupt environment, but does not give resources to fight corruption.

Much humour, as the jokes reviewed above, about cultural stereotypes might work as relief mechanisms as well without any further meaning. Further, Claver (2009) states that jokes about Filipinos are thrown »in reaction to the deep shame they feel in the constant citing of their country of origin as one of the most corrupt in the world today. So they trade jokes — even painful ones — for their possible cathartic effect.«

Humour and laughter seen from the theories of venting superfluous energies are most probably also contributing to the normalization of corruption. Humour and laughter about corruption which build on relief theory possibly does not have any potential to change the status quo, but rather maintain it by allowing organizational members peace of mind while reproducing corrupt patterns. For some conditions that cannot be changed by agents, for example physical disease and the prospects of death (see for example Pettegrew 2017), humour could be an effective and productive strategy. However, corruption, although it could seem endemic, is always possibly to combat at least in the long-term. If humour and laughter about corruption draw on the relief theory, they should normatively only be used as short-term measures to alleviate the pain now, but complemented with an idea for a future organization without or at least with less corruption. So, in a situation which is so corrupt that nothing could be done to improve the situation, this strategy might be useful for organizational members to stay sane. But the effect of such humour and laughter will probably not de-normalize corruption.

4.4 Transgressive Strategies

I complement Morreall's typology with a distinction between the cynical and the kynical, as discussed by Peter Sloterdijk (1988). The cynical strategies encompasses humour and laughter of those engaging in corrupt practices. Along the lines of Fleming and Zyglidopoulos (2009) and Felices-Luna (2016), such humour could be a way to rationalize corruption and provide the emotional base for continuing to be corrupt. For Sloterdijk, this is humour of the ruling class, those in power, but here I frame it more as humour of the corrupt. The kynical, the transgressive, is a much more radical form of humour, politically incorrect, absurd, which provokes a laughter that fundamentally re-evaluates the situation. Rather than kynical laughter being a fourth category, I see it as the intensified, unserious way in which social critique is put forth from the bottom up, often in a non-discursive way. Benatar (2017) sees this subversive form of humour as productive as social critique.

An example of a transgressive strategy towards corruption (and other forms of wrongdoing) is the one adapted by Antanas Mockus, a Colombian politician. He presided over Bogotá and become known for subjecting surprising and humorous initiatives upon the city's inhabitants. For example, a famous initiative included hiring 20 mimes to make fun of traffic violators, because he believed Colombians were more afraid of being ridiculed than fined. He connects this to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, and that »innovative behaviour can be useful when you run out of words« (Romero 2010). The success of some of Antanas Mockus'

measures can be seen as a source of inspiration for anti-corruption based on transgressive strategies.

Another example concerns two comedians in Mexico City who have launched a crusade against corruption, and indeed any form of wrongdoing. They call themselves the super civics. Dressed in costumes they go around and actively meddle with people's lives, trying to make them comply with rules. Regarding anti-corruption, they provoked a police officer, who was going to turn a blind eye on a parking violations, to indeed do his job (c.f. The Global Herald 2017). A vendor of sports cars, who usually parked his cars illegally on the pavement for public display, was thereby forced to park his cars inside the garage. The super civics therefore meddle with people's lives, actively interfering with them, to make them fulfil rules. They do this in a very blatant way – dressing up like Jesus or other characters who draw attention. Antonius Mockus and the super civics could be seen as present-day examples of Sloterdijk's Diogenes.

Turning to an organizational context, a study of kynical, transgressive strategies would be need to see if they are functional in an organizational context. Furthermore, it seems much less likely to find such practices than other forms of humour. From a more normative perspective, such strategies could be productive but are certainly riskier for the individuals engaging in them. When using such a strategy, the individuals take on the identity of the complete stranger, the jester, the clown, who criticizes the organization and its corrupt practices from an ›outside within‹. They thus distance themselves from the social relationships of which they are part, which could lead to several kinds of negative consequences. For the purpose of this paper, the examples about Mockus and the super civics show that we can be inspired by such ›humorous anti-corruption activism‹ within organizations and try to adapt it to the limits of the organizational setting. One could imagine, similarly to drama workshops about corruption (c.f. Brytting et al. 2011), that one could invite ›kynics‹ to the organization in order to create a significant jolt, shaking up the organization. These transgressive strategies could thus have a direct impact on the rationalization, socialization, and institutionalization of corruption. However, there is also a risk that the transgressive strategies are seen as something extraordinary, somewhat like a carnival where all the roles are reversed, but only for a brief time. If they are seen in this way, the transgressive strategies will most probably be seen as an aberration which do not leave any long-standing impact on normalization processes.

In this part I have discussed how various kinds of humour can be manifested in organizational practices, and what kind of impact they could have on the normalization and de-normalization of corruption.

5. Conclusions

This paper has intended to follow the view by Breit et al. (2015) on the need of theorizing corruption and anti-corruption creatively in order to see new facets of it. The paper started off identifying that humour and laughter regarding corrup-

tion is a parallel discourse alongside the more serious side of corruption discourse, which states that corruption is a fundamental world evil.

I argued that to both engage in descriptive studies about the role of humour and laughter in relation to corruption, and in normative project where one devises anti-corruption strategies based on humour and laughter, there is a need for a theoretical base. This paper was aimed at providing such a base. Based on this theoretical framework, I have developed ideas about the role that the four different kinds of humour and laughter could play in organizations, related to corruption, both descriptively and normatively.

Related to the descriptive part, the theoretical review indicates that we could study humour related to corruption and anti-corruption in organizations, by using these four forms of humour theory. One could study the prevalence of various forms of humour in various more corrupt or less corrupt organizational settings. One could also study whether the assumptions generated from the theories are relevant and accurate in various empirical settings. This approach can most probably generate some interesting and novel research.

Regarding the normative part, one could develop anti-corruption programs that incorporate humour and laughter and establish how effective they are in practice. In such an endeavour, the theoretical framework indicates that some basic forms of humour could be more productive. The most promising approach would probably be based on incongruity theory, while the transgressive theory and the Bergsonian superiority theory would also be worth exploring. Also, it is argued that one should avoid, or at least be aware of the disadvantages of, other superiority theories and relief theories. The study indicates that there can be blind spots in current anti-corruption measures due to their ›serious‹ points of departure. Once again, it needs to be said that I do not take the issue of corruption lightly, but at the same time we are aware that anti-corruption measures are not always effective, and that there is a need to creative approaches to understand and fight corruption. Humour and laughter opens up one such avenue. Humour differs from the more rational anti-corruption measures described by Ashforth and Anand (2003) in that they appeal to the emotional register of organizational members. Rather than repeating the mantra that corruption is evil, to which many organizational members are immune (it is well-known that many people read ethics policies and think that it is all common sense or window-dressing), humour could be a way to engage people in anti-corruption.

Apart from descriptive studies of how humour and laughter works related to corruption in an organizational setting, and normative projects to fight corruption, this paper opens up a number of potentially productive avenues. There are a number of ways in which humour, more generally, can be studied in relation to corruption and anti-corruption. One potential avenue could be to analyse discursive and symbolic representations of corruption and anti-corruption humour, including comedy, cartoons, satire, quips, puns, and comic impersonations, empirically. These cultural representations could help us understand the particularities of corruption and anti-corruption in different social, cultural, geographical, and institutional contexts. One could also study political satire, comedy, not only
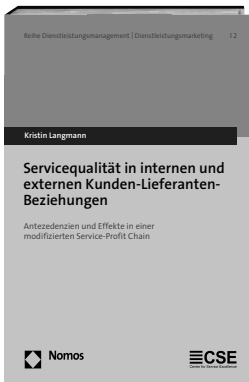
analysing its content but also its effects. The focus on humour and laughter in this paper also brings the attention to less discursive forms of fighting corruption, such as art, music, theatre, and drama (see for example Brytting et al. 2011) which could be an interesting complement to current debates about corruption and anti-corruption.

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