

Polycracy as an A-system of Rule? Displacements and Replacements of the Political in an Unbounded Dictatorship

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Abstract

The concept of polycracy is beset by a number of paradoxes: it designates a form of political rule in the absence of such rule. In such circumstances, a multiplicity of social formations, economic and financial agencies and operational functions install themselves anomically at local level and extend independently of and beyond policy and legislation. In doing so, they split and supplant frameworks of the state and of political and societal institutions. This article sets out to trace the lineages of the concept of polycracy and its instantiations in a system of rule that involves a process of political de-structuring. More specifically, the question explored here is what *takes place* in the destroyed political space and what *takes its place* in the unbounded state of the Nazi dictatorship.

Keywords: polycracy; National Socialist totalitarianism; Nazi regime; party–state relationship; occupying regime; Weimar Republic; quantitatively total state

Introduction

Even with historical hindsight, the phenomenon termed “totalitarianism” presents a number of conundrums. To start off with, it resists definition. To describe it as a “system of rule” risks contradiction (see Kershaw 1999, 222), because “a-systematicity” is its most pertinent characteristic. As a particular type of modern dictatorship, it has invited comparisons, yet such comparisons remain limited and general (considering e.g. the limited comparability of the National Socialist regime in Germany and the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union—see Kershaw 1999). The process of political disintegration described by it is bound to leave the concept under-theorised (see Kershaw 1991, 98)

and possibly even to impress itself on the theorist as incomprehensible (see Arendt [1951] 1994, viii), both conceptually and politically. In this article, we propose to put one of the elements specifying “totalitarianism” to the test: Can “polycracy” provide a specifying criterion for the definition of “totalitarianism”? If so, how would it have to be conceptualised in order to be able to account for the simultaneous diffraction and concentration of structures and agencies that reconfigure governance for conditions of geopolitical expansion, invasion, annexation and occupation; total mobilisation for war; and population relocations, forced labour and genocide?

The term “polycracy”, as Walther Hofer points out, is of recent coinage. It designates social and political processes unlike those described by any of the classical theories of political organisation (Hofer 1986, 249; see also Arendt [1951] 1994, 461; also Schmitt 2000, 66) or system or type of rule.

Writing in the aftermath of war and genocide in the late 1940s, Hannah Arendt ventures this description: “We always suspected, but we now know that the [National Socialist] regime was never ‘monolithic’ but ‘consciously constructed around overlapping, duplicating, and parallel functions’ ...” (Arendt [1951] 1994, xxxii–xxxiii; also 404 fn. 8).

What she pinpoints here had, in fact, been articulated by Carl Schmitt even before the Second World War in his prescient analyses of the Nazi dictatorship (1933) and by Ernst Fraenkel and Franz Neumann during the course of the War and in its immediate aftermath. The multi-levelled dynamic functioning of the Nazi regime became the subject of further investigation in the 1960s and 70s, first by Klaus Hildebrand, Karl Bracher and Peter Hüttenberger and later by Ian Kershaw. Even as they differed in the details of their analysis, all of these historians and political theorists either explicitly or implicitly returned to Johannes Popitz’s concept of “polycracy”, coined in the late 1920s to take account of the decline of the German state during the late Weimar period.

“Polycracy”—A conceptual–political history

Popitz held on to a substantive universal idea of the state against its devolution and dissolution into concrete orders and functions. In his positions in the Finance Ministry in the latter half of the 1920s, he was intent on clearing up Weimar’s “administrative confusions” (see Kennedy 2004, 147; also Schmitt 2000, 62 fn. 4) and on restoring the authority of a centralised state.

Carl Schmitt’s conversations with Johannes Popitz (the friendship with whom Schmitt only reluctantly admitted to) trace the decline of the state in the Weimar Republic with its proliferation of special interests, political parties and particularist movements. Popitz views this process as the replacement of “the state as the source of order and the locus of authoritative decisions ... by the notion of ‘free competition’ and ‘the self-organisation of society’” (see Kennedy 2004, 33). This defines Popitz’s notion of polycracy. “Pressures from within the private sector and the party politics of the

Reichstag had created,” he argued in 1927, “a ‘polycratic’ system that displaced parliamentary democratic will formation” (Kennedy 2004, 147). What these “diverse forms of economic organisations and public/private partnerships” had in common was the “fact that they retained a degree of independence from the state” while assuming responsibility for “important public functions” (Kennedy 2004, 142 fn. 3).

While, for Popitz, polycracy is tied up with the expanding role of “private interests” in the “private sector” of the economy and in party-political manoeuvring in the *Reichstag*, for Schmitt it emerges, in the first instance, from a plurality of social power complexes dividing up the unity of the state (see Schmitt [1931] 1988, 178) and transcending territorial boundaries and the formation of political will (Schmitt [1931] 1996, 4). This occurs, Schmitt elaborates, where the division between state and society, government and people that still characterises the state of the nineteenth century is levelled and where the state itself becomes identified with elements of society, appearing as the “self-organisation” of society. In this configuration, the relative autonomy and neutrality of the state vis-à-vis society, the economy and social interest groups disappear and state, society and the economy cease to exist as relatively separate spheres.

Schmitt argues that a thoroughgoing transformation of the Weimar state in relation to society renders all social and economic problems as political problems:

The society-become-state turns into an economic state, a cultural state, a ... welfare state, a provisioning state; the state-become-self-organising society, which has thereby become inseparable from it, seizes upon all social processes, i.e. everything concerning human interactions. Within this configuration, there is no arena left, in relation to which the state can maintain strict neutrality in the sense of non-intervention. The parties, in which different social interests and tendencies are organised, form the society-turned-party state itself. And to the extent that there are economically, faith and culturally-based parties, there is no way for the state to remain neutral in relation to the economic, religious, and cultural domains. Within the state that has become the self-organisation of society, there is nothing that does not, at least potentially, become a matter for the state and politics. (Schmitt [1931] 1996, 4; see also Schmitt [1931] 1988, 172)

Schmitt traces this development in three stages: from the absolutist state of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the liberal or neutral state of the nineteenth century to the “total state” of the identity of state and society in the late Weimar Republic (Schmitt [1931] 1996, 79).

The political extrapolations from Popitz’s initially predominantly economic account of “polycracy” do not, therefore, represent a sleight of hand on Schmitt’s part. Instead, they arise from the dissolution of the sovereignty of the state in its capitulation to “social power complexes” that Schmitt, writing in 1931, observes, while bristling at this very observation.

Late Weimar's plurality of social power complexes, interest groups and political parties degenerates into what Schmitt terms a "quantitatively total state" or a "weak state" (Schmitt [1933] 1994, 213). During the late Weimar period, the state effaced itself in ceding its unity to a plurality of "*totale Weltanschauungsparteien*", in the first instance, each of which strove to usurp political totality and to subordinate the state to its own purposes. Growing out of the state and blasting their way through it, they themselves became independent entities, displacing the role of the state in organising society and dissolving the distinction between state and society.

Polycracy for Schmitt also arises with the dissolution of a unitary political will into myriad social power complexes, which are best exemplified in the private sector of the economy, in the second instance. In the economic sphere, polycracy comes to characterise the state-cum-economy. It is here that parliamentary political processes are losing their definitive role for the state as they are being overtaken by an economy that is subject to a plurality of particularist interests and private law (see Schmitt [1931] 1996, 88, 110).

This process paves the way for the rupture which transcends the unitary power symbolised in the Constitution, neutralising the state and law in the process. Law is emptied, perverted and potentially dissolved (Bracher 1962, 50; see also Iakovu 2009, 439) through post hoc legitimations of unjust measures. Self-governing particularist social and "political" entities with total claims escape state circumscription, legal definition and control, political institutions and also parliamentary debate and legislature. Such entities proliferate wildly and widely at local level, that is, in municipal and communal committees and associations whose interests gain social facticity through compromises, agreements, tactics, special measures and directives, determinations of quotas, and the corresponding apportionment of offices, incomes and privileges (see Schmitt [1931] 1996, 88, 110). In 1931, Schmitt specifies this turn towards the quantitatively total state as being distinct from the "qualitatively total state" of Fascist Italy. In the latter state, the party reasserts the sovereignty of the state and strengthens the state in its monopoly of power.

The implosion of the political registered in Schmitt's writings of the late 1920s and early 1930s does, indeed, present the attempt at its theorisation with imponderabilities. The same process that advances the recession of the state tendentially abolishes the independence and critical distance of any attempt at its theorisation. The receding normative horizon of the state leaves the investigation of this process beholden to what it describes (see Sigmund Neumann [1942] 1965, xviii; also Schmitt 2000, 77, 92–101); this confronts the theorist with the paradox of developing critical perspectives on a dynamic process of dissolution that engulfs its very theorisation.

“Polycracy” within the Frame of Totalitarianism

The notion of polycracy, in its early conceptualisations in the context of the dissolution of the Weimar state and constitutionalism with quantitatively total power, is largely

absent from subsequent framings of totalitarianism in four broad themes. These themes have become prevalent both in a substantial body of scholarly literature and in political affiliation and activism:

- A generic understanding of totalitarianism as total (state-political) domination, usually designated as “fascism” or as “total state” or “totalitarian state”.
- The Comintern ideologeme, which construes National Socialism as “fascism”, associating it with Italian Fascism, which (following Lenin’s 1916 characterisation of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism) it had characterised in 1924 as the orchestration of expansion and war on the part of the most reactionary and powerful groups within highly concentrated finance capital, in the service of capitalist interests and imperialist aims in the final stage of bourgeois-capitalist rule. Re-editing it for a response to National Socialism, the Comintern’s Seventh Congress (1935) resolution speaks of National Socialism *qua* fascism—as the “terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic, and imperialist elements of finance capital” (Dimitrov [1935] 1972, 86–119).
- The principal Cold War ideologeme, which constructs an unqualified analogy and assimilates an earlier understanding of Hitler and the role of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) to a later understanding of Stalin and the role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) within the Comintern.
- The division of historiographical explanations of the conditions for the emergence of Nazi totalitarianism and genocide into (politically based) intentionalism, on the one hand, and (socially–economically based) functionalism, on the other, in the series of debates in the 1980s that has become known as the *Historikerstreit*.¹

An analysis of polycracy and of its *horizontal* power relations is forestalled in these framings, focusing as they do either on total political domination or on the subordination

¹ The positions in this debate were initially differentiated and labelled by Timothy Mason as “intentionalist” and “functionalist”, with the names of Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrandt and Eberhard Jaeckel being associated with the former (and Daniel Goldhagen emerging at a later point as an extreme intentionalist) and those of Hans Mommsen, Martin Broszat and Mason himself with the latter (Mason, 1981) (and Götz Aly emerging at a later point as an extreme functionalist). The terms, positions and conceptualisations have been elaborated in the ensuing debates, initiated notably by Yehuda Bauer and Ian Kershaw, to the point where the labels “intentionalist” and “functionalist” appear simplistic and distorting. The attempted synthesis talks of the “cumulative radicalisation” of policies and their implementation generated by competing agencies with overlapping competencies and authorisations and “working towards the *Führer*” on the basis of their own interpretations of their mission.

of economic interests of capital to the political priorities of National Socialism, or on the primacy of socio-economic determinants. In any and all of these cases, totalitarianism is construed as a centripetal force that determines relationships of super- and subordination. A circularity arises from the dualism construed between politics and economy/industry for which the duality of state–society is being brought in as a template through the back door, even though it had been declared out of explanatory purchase for totalitarianism. This is because the polycratic relationships unique to totalitarian rule arise within a novel triadic formation of state, party and “people” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) (see Schmitt 1933) following the transition from Weimar’s party-political plurality to the primacy of a single totalitarian party.

To be able to embark on a conceptualisation of totalitarian polycracy, we would need to return to some of the inferences that Schmitt draws from Popitz’s economic notion of “polycracy”. Along with these extrapolations, we would need to consider a shift from primarily economic (Popitz) sites to political and legal (Schmitt) domains of application, without granting determinacy to any of these instances. If polycracy were to be described in terms of the disintegration of the state, initially by its splitting into multiple (not simply dual) centres (“poly-”) whose relationships form power structures (“-cracy”), then the task would be to investigate their locations and interrelationships (rather than identifying—usually dualistically and hierarchically conceived—power blocs as commanding heights: see Czichon 1968, 168–192; also Buchheim and Scherner 2006, 391).

Bringing the concept of polycracy to bear on the understanding of totalitarianism would therefore not amount so much to introducing a centrifugal force nor to shifting the balance from the frequently asserted “primacy of politics” (as Tim Mason would have it: 1968, 194) towards functionalism (as Eberhard Czichon would have it: 1968, 168–192). It would amount to redirecting the analysis so as to take account of a profound reorganisation of the relationship between state, society, economy and ideology in a totalitarian party-dynamic, unbounded movement (see Schulz 1962, 375). This movement transforms the role of each one of these instances as they are being set in motion in relation to the other elements and as they are grafted onto local conditions and societal histories (see Hüttenberger 1976, 426; also Schulz 1962, 459, 579, 599).

Franz Neumann provides us with a point of departure for analysing these transformations. He argues that following the 1933 *Machtergreifung*, “society cease[d] to be distinguished from the state; it [was] totally permeated and determined by [boundless] political power” and, more specifically, by what he calls a “monopolistic party” (1957, 245). The polycratic dimension of totalitarian rule manifested itself in the dynamic character of “*rastlose Aktion*” (restless action) evinced in ever-changing appointments, competencies, domains, directives, functions, special powers and decrees (see Arendt [1951] 1994, 404 fn. 8). Hans Mommsen (1966), Peter Hüttenberger (1976, 417–442) and, more recently, Donald Bloxham (2001, 25–60) draw attention to the proliferation of special powers: newly appointed functionaries in newly created

administrative positions, “rival interests and groups vying for power even across official boundaries of jurisdiction” (Bloxham 2001, 37). Rather than abolishing a vertical axis of power, rival interests and groups have become concretely implicit in the horizontal relationships—as, for instance, in the case “where rival paladins competed for Hitler's favour and where success depended on the degree to which they anticipated and fulfilled his wishes” (Hofer 1986, 236). This would entail the involvement of the *Führer* in horizontal relationships, not as principle but as personification of an imagined “will” (see Franz Neumann [1942, 1944] 2009, 447, also 469; Iakovu 2009, 435). Hofer elaborates on such “working towards the *Führer*”:

The rivalries were directed not against Hitler but for him. They very often originated in a rival's desire to make a better impression on his Führer by striving to execute his plans as faithfully and promptly as possible. These rivalries by no means necessarily impaired the efficient prosecution of Hitler's aims—on the contrary (1986, 229)

Even the repressive apparatus, although effective—especially in regard to population groups targeted for disenfranchisement, isolation, persecution and, in certain instances, extermination—was neither “monolithic” nor fully integrated (Siegel 1988, 83). In fact, it relied to a significant extent on initiatives on the part of party activists at local level and on the part of the *Gauleiter* at regional level, reinforced in turn by legislative measures taken at national level (Schaarschmidt 2017, 226, 229).

In Nazi Germany, polycratic relationships manifested themselves in accordance with an additional condition, which can be identified as definitive only through its paradoxical effect: stabilisation through movement, effectiveness through inefficiency. Or, to be more precise, effectiveness through the combination of the efficiency of conventional bureaucracy, under the partial disintegration of structures of the state (see Reichardt and Seibel 2011, 9) and their replacement by reintegrating and steering mechanisms, including personalisation, informalisation and ideologisation (Reichardt and Seibel 2011, 18; also Schaarschmidt 2017, 224), rather than efficiency as a condition of effectiveness. Early attempts to capture this element identify the driving forces of totalitarianism as “permanent revolution” (Sigmund Neumann), “social movement” (Rudolf Heberle) and “laws of movement” (Hannah Arendt) (see Sauer 1962, 689).

A Totalitarian Dynamic

Totalitarian rule, even if understood as domination, does not entirely, and perhaps not even primarily, rely on vertical relationships of super- and subordination. A notion of vertical relationality is at least relativised, if not transformed, in our understanding, if we take a closer look at horizontal relationships and at the kinds of social exchange and competition that form their conduits (see Volckart 2003, 175; also Cary 2002, 557). Conversely, if we were to specify polycracy by reference to plural power structures, we would have to retain a horizon of monarchy. But in retaining a monocratic axis, we would have to confront the challenge of thinking monarchy without invoking “the state” as its foundation. Responding to this challenge, Hüttenberger suggests that

“*Herrschaftsträger*” be interpreted as nodes of agencies that exercise political functions structured in overlapping, competing and continuously changing, dynamically expanding, contracting, and internally differentiating and concentrating networks (see Hüttenberger 1976, 422).

Such nodes could take different forms.

The first and most striking form would be the multiplication of offices between party and state. This was not to be understood as a symmetrical dualism between the National Socialist Party acting outside the bounds of any norms and rules, on the one hand, and a rational–bureaucratic state, on the other; rather, it should be understood as an emerging hybrid form of political organisation connecting state, party and industry (see Reichardt and Seibel 2011, 12). As Hannah Arendt observes, “with a fantastic thoroughness [and as a matter of principle], the Nazis made sure that every function of the state administration would be duplicated by some party organ” ([1951] 1994, 396), creating a division of authority. But it did not remain at the level of mere duplication: the Nazi party multiplied its offices and functions, creating a proliferation of ever-changing power structures charged with identical tasks, while nominally retaining pre-existing offices. Centres of power, while constantly shifting, remained a mystery, “to such an extent that the members of the ruling clique themselves could never be absolutely sure of their own position ...” (Arendt [1951] 1994, 400).

The sites in this network in which the nodes were particularly densely concentrated—in the ministries, for instance—have been relatively well described, even in their overlapping and conflicting domains, authorities and competencies, convergences and divergences. This was the case, for example, with the “interests” and functions of the SS *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA) (“Reich Security Main Office”) and the *Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt* (WVHA) (SS “Economic and Administration Head Office”); of the *Reichswehr* (“Reich armed forces”) and industry; of the *Reichswehr* and the *Reichssiedlungsamt*; of Albert Speer’s Armaments Ministry, on the one hand, and the Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps (*Inspektion der Konzentrationslager* or *IKL*), WVHA, RSHA, *Wehrmacht* and private corporations, on the other (Bloxham 2001, 26–28).

Polycracy between Economics and Politics

Less well understood is what Franz Neumann refers to as “polycracy” in the context of the processes of concentration, cartelisation and monopolisation in the economy under totalitarianism, for which he coins the term “Totalitarian Monopoly Capitalism” ([1942, 1944] 2009, 261). Neumann cites the Hermann Goering Ore Mining and Iron Works Corporation Ltd (“*Reichswerke, A.G. für Erzbergbau und Eisenhütten, Hermann Goering*”), a nominally state-controlled Nazi conglomerate, as an instance of a “party economy” that he interprets as a political, rather than an economic, phenomenon ([1942, 1944] 2009, 301). However, the provisions of the law on forced cartelisation were

inconsistently applied, to uneven effect. The “planning” of the “planned economy” was often haphazard, chaotic and contradictory (Buchheim and Scherner 2006, 410).

Recent scholarship has challenged the notion of a “party economy” understood as a co-ordinated initiative to appropriate private capital and industry in a consistent drive towards nationalisation. The party shifted its focus to macroeconomic priorities and to measures aimed both at maximising the exploitation of existing means of production, including those of the occupied territories, and at controlling and rationing the apportionment of raw materials (Abelhauser 2002, 26). Bloxham cites the example of the tensions within the complex of SS institutions: between those “officials directly involved in industry [who] wished for the primacy of economics” and the “SS hierarchy”, many of whom “worked solely for the victory of ideology” (2001, 42).

In the corporate sector, the promotion of autarky, expansion and armament “fragmented corporate interests and created new coalitions between subsets of executives and specific government or military agencies”. It meant breaking down “linear divisions over output strategies between firms and the state” and “replac[ing] them with battles fought out within the firms” in which party-political objectives often prevailed (Hayes 2009, 39). Thus, the same framework of regimentation contained uncoordinated economic decisions (Franz Neumann [1942, 1944] 2009, 314). These were partly structured by ideological precepts, partly enacted on the basis of considerations of short-term versus long-term market expectations (see Scherner 2002, 431, 434, 445, 447, 448; also Buchheim and Scherner 2006, 411) and partly adhered to as decrees and warnings imbued with the force of command.

Polycracy in Occupation Regimes

Numerous studies have devoted themselves to tracing the convergences and divergences of polycratic diffusion in the processes of restructuring governance and economic strategies in the *Reich*; but political analysis of the dynamic social and political structures, agencies and processes in societies under occupation is scarce in comparison. While a number of highly acclaimed studies on the economic–social–ideological policies, practices and rationalisation of forced labour in occupied Poland have appeared (see e.g. Stefanski 2005, 38–67; also Allen 1965; Tooze 2006), these tend to mushroom in an apparently theoretical no-man’s-land and remain shy of the task of a historical–political investigation relating the occupation to a theory of modern dictatorship (Evans 1983, 101).

On the other hand, some of the classical studies of the Nazi dictatorship that appeared during and after the War, including some ground-breaking analyses in the 1950s and 1960s, tend to treat the occupation as an extension and expansion of the unbounded dynamic forces of National Socialism (see Arendt [1951] 1994, 422; also Bracher, Sauer and Schulz 1962, 12).

This may indeed be said of the reliance of the German war effort on the increasingly brutal exploitation of foreign economies, of the extraction of resources from occupied territories, of the costs of occupation and of the war effort imposed on occupied countries' economies. It may also be said of the progressive multilateralisation of clearing systems' facilitating unpaid exports (see Fonzi 2012, 157–158) for the purposes of shoring up the war economy (Fonzi 2012, 158) and of the increase in clearing debt leading to rising inflation (Fonzi 2012, 156, 161).

But the idea of expansion, extension and radicalisation, if considered as a political dynamic, is questionable. National imperialism, on the latter account, mobilises and diverts the internal dynamics and problems to the external expansion and seizure of assets (Bracher 1962, 230); this starts with the subordination of foreign relationships to the requirement of stabilising the totalitarian dictatorship internally, and is followed by militant external expansion of the internal dynamic (Bracher 1962, 240). While acknowledging that it was expansion—virtually “limitless extension in time and space” (Neumann [1942] 1965, 3)—that created continuing dynamism and transformations both within and concentrically around the *Reich*, these studies remain strangely focused on polycratic aspects of the administrative and governmental dynamics *internal* to the *Reich*. Within these dynamics, social and political structures, while being neutralised, levelled and in certain instances obliterated, continued to enjoy some salience in historical memory, action orientations, local-level organisational arrangements and the identification of traditional elites in the civil service (Seibel 2011, 244–245).

Invasion and occupation on the model of “extension” and “expansion” are also described in terms of “export” [“of the ‘systemlessness’ ... that characterised the Nazi dictatorship ... from the Reich to occupied Europe” (Kirk 2003, 205)] and “replacement” (Kershaw 1993, 109). In a political–theoretical account, polycracy is thought to be magnified, escalated, intensified and radicalised in the occupied territories (Kershaw 1993, 109, 115, 117, 118; see also Mommsen's idea of “cumulative radicalisation” 1976, 785–790).

On closer inspection, however, these terms turn out to be inadequate, even misleading. They presuppose that it is the *same dynamic*, emerging from the same socio-political matrices characterising the internal processes of social and political dissolution and reintegration, that finds extension, expansion and radicalisation in and through Nazi Germany's *Wehrmacht*, *Einsatzgruppen* and occupation forces' invasion, annexation and occupation of other European territories.

Wolf Gruner and Jörg Osterloh have launched a similar critique of widely held notions about the intensification of the Nazi regime's anti-Jewish policies with successive annexations between 1939 and 1944. Instead, they suggest,

the key to understanding the intensification of anti-Jewish policy in the course of the Nazi regime's annexations, on the one hand, and the inconsistency of regional measures,

on the other, lies precisely in these mutual actions between local, regional, and central persecutory measures. (Gruner and Osterloh 2015, 4)

Transformations of the Totalitarian Dynamic in its Expansion

In attempting to get to grips with the phenomenon of polycracy under the Nazi annexation and occupation of Poland, we can, at this stage, outline only a few tentative steps towards an analysis. Nevertheless, these tentative steps would suggest some ideas that could reorientate the hitherto largely functionalist² analyses of Nazi dictatorship in its expansion. We venture to suggest that an understanding of polycracy in the Nazi annexation and occupation of Poland would have to move away from notions of “expansion” or “extension” of the political dynamic internal to the *Reich* to a notion of specific qualitative “transformations” within this dynamic itself in the occupation of Poland.

In order to be able to mount these considerations, we would need to retrace the steps in the early conceptualisations of “polycracy” and “quantitative totality” in the late Weimar Republic. Even though polycracy, forming part of the dynamic of totalitarianism, is perceived by its early theorists as an unprecedented phenomenon, it is not without its social basis—namely, a plurality of social power complexes hollowing out and neutralising the unity of the state as they divide it up and subordinate it to particularist interests, which in turn make a claim on totality. *Weltanschauungsparteien*, in their own claim to totality, juxtapose themselves to, model themselves on and become parasitic upon state institutions, which they then proceed to hollow out.

No such antecedents can be made out in the annexation and occupation of Polish territories (as delineated by the post-World War I borders) by Nazi-German military and administrative forces. In fact, the structures of the Polish state and society were fragmented and displaced, and the regional authorities installed were more tightly linked to the centralised structures of administrative control than to those of the local administration (see Schaarschmidt 2017, 232). These centralised structures included the higher-level party organisations such as the Higher SS and Police Leaders (HSSP) and the SS Security Service (SD). While no recognisable continuity with previously existing *institutions* was maintained, totalitarian rule over the (re-)annexed and occupied territories was differentially grafted onto locally specific conditions which were newly created geo- and biopolitically. This was achieved by drawing and redrawing provincial and administrative borders in line with ideologically constructed and forcibly

² It would appear that the accounts of “cumulative radicalisation” which were to chart a path beyond or out of the horns of the “intentionalism”–“functionalism” debates are themselves slanted towards functionalism in seeking to align a political dynamic of polycracy with an economic account of the escalating brutalisation in the exploitation of the occupied territories (see e.g. Fonzi 2012, 156, 158, 161, 163–164, 178). However, the account of this alignment was partly modified by the claim of a contradiction between economic and political goals (Fonzi 2012, 172, 178).

implemented demographic ordering, with the corresponding differential extractive, distributive, policing, labour and genocidal regimes (see Gross 2000a, 15).

Societal transformation was concretely and violently enacted in direct correspondence with totalising political–ideological blueprints. Without mediation or organisation through even shells or distant memories of social and political institutions, or through a total party or parties, at a distance from the *Führerkult* or any impressionability of charismatic leadership to bundle polycratic forces, and without a mass movement orientated to the *Führer* to provide direction to centrifugal dynamism, the implosion of the political becomes all the more violent. In the process, ideology, politics and economics are forced together to such an extent that settlement policy and genocide, *Lebensraum* and ghettoisation, productivity of labour and extermination through labour lose the aspect of contradiction; instead, they become integral to a nexus of genocide, economic extraction and exploitation, and population relocation and settlement policy.

Under conditions of occupation, a new form of dictatorship cannot graft itself onto power complexes that, while constituting deep cleavages in society, have hitherto not found politically organised forms. In particular, it cannot do so without the dramatic reorganisation of social structures and the abolition of political institutions, local administrations and parties; of market exchanges and the social division of labour; or of relatively regulated currencies, prices and wages.

Moreover, at a distance from charismatic leadership and in the absence of a total party growing out of concentrated social power complexes, mobilisation for total war, settlement policy, forced population relocations, expropriation and genocide provide a strong monocratic axis in the occupied Eastern territories. But such a monocratic axis is not readily couched in terms of centres of power and ideology capable of mass mobilisation in those territories (see Schmitt [1947, 1958] 2003, 433). The three mechanisms that reintegrated the National Socialist administration, identified by Reichardt and Seibel (2011, 18) as personalisation (through the *Führerprinzip*), informalisation (through the dynamism of the National Socialist *movement*) and ideologisation (“total” political orientation along the lines of *nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung*), cannot be said to function as reintegration mechanisms in the administration of societies under occupation.

Corruption as Integrating Factor

Yet we cannot infer or conclude that the occupation was a monolithic imposition of “colonial or foreign domination”, because even the occupation administration had to rely on networks of coordination reaching into the society over which it ruled rather than on rigid hierarchical lines of command. Moreover, as Jan Gross shows,

just as there are differences in responses to occupation by different groups within the subjugated society, there are also a variety of interest groups in the administration of the occupying power. (1979, 50)

Even the SS's own adherence to party structures and decrees in the occupied territories was vague. The NSDAP failed to "fulfil its function of informal control over the administration" (Gross 1979, 57). While it achieved regional centralisation, it failed to coordinate various regions, thus spawning administrative chaos:

A direct consequence of centralisation was, paradoxically, the inability of the central authorities to provide overall guidance or to shape binding policies. They were, instead, lost in a maze of detail. (Gross 1979, 53)

In undertaking the task "to reconstruct the process by which a society was destroyed and to offer an analysis of the forms of collective life that appeared in its stead" (Gross 1979, 44), Gross redirects the categories for analysing the monocratic axis away from the normativity that has hitherto bound the state to constituted and organised human collectives. In a move no less bold than that of his predecessors—Hannah Arendt and Franz Neumann—in thinking the unthinkable, he charts a path for thinking the parasitism of totalitarianism in its different forms. Summing up the *modi operandi* of the occupying regime, he points to corruption as "the single most characteristic social phenomenon in a society under occupation" (1979, 145). Focusing on the occupation regime in the *Generalgouvernement*, he explains,

... corruption acquired nomic quality in the GG and established social bonds where only coercion would otherwise have existed. It may be viewed as the only system within which exchange, transaction, and reciprocity take place. Corruption thus emerges as the principal mode of integration, in much the same way as ... economic exchange, a legal system, or, finally, the state in a modern polity. Consequently ... the peculiar general phenomenon of a *corrupt state* can be distinguished from, merely, the corruption of state officials. (1979, 145)

Corruption thrives in the absence of institutions to bridge deep societal cleavages (Gross 1979, 148), de-legitimizing any norms (Gross 1979, 154). It functions as a node for polycratic dispersion in the form of a multitude of mediators to broker deals, concessions and transactions that would not be viable within a regulated process or a legal framework (Gross 1979, 149).

Cooperation with Occupying Regimes as (Re-)organisational Factor

Forms of cooperation, likewise, achieved *politically* structuring effects in Nazi occupation regimes in the Polish territories. As a possibility for action, cooperation arises contingently, yet not coincidentally. It is defined by a generalised asymmetry and inequality between occupiers and occupied who enter into relationships on the basis of a limited set of converging objectives (e.g. ideological affinities) among otherwise

heterogeneous interests.³ The occupying forces concede a limited extent of independent interests and goals to the occupied, based on the recognition of the latter's local knowledge and historical situatedness; this in turn provides for limited autonomous agency on the part of members of the occupied society. Such agency and influence are limited in the sense that they serve the power and interests of the occupying regime. They emerge

at the intersection between the occupier's [continuously shifting] intent and the occupied's perception [without amounting to a shared interpretation] about the range of options at their disposal. (Gross 2000a, 26)

Cooperation is thus embedded in the historical, social and political conditions of the occupied society, but it is circumscribed by the occupying regime (Gross 2000a, 24); yet—and here it displays one aspect of its relationship to a monocratic axis of power—it is instrumental in the thoroughgoing demographic, social, political and economic reorganisation of the occupied society (Tauber 2006, 13; also Röhr 2006, 28, 29, 37; Gross 2000a, 21–23). Another aspect of its relationship to a monocratic axis arises from the displacement of the psychic conditions of agency under conditions of political and social disintegration: to the extent that cooperating individuals are situated within the disintegration that circumscribes their active agency of co-operation, they tend to continue to uphold the vision of integration into a tightly structured social order. Such integration they find more readily in the organisation of the occupying regime than in the society disarticulated under the occupation (see Sartre [1945] 1949, 49).

The occupying forces, in their turn, to some extent relied on cooperative relationships with existing social, educational and cultural agencies, among them the Central Welfare Council consisting of former office-bearers of the government and administration of the Second Polish Republic, and with members of the Polish Red Cross and the Polish underground state (Friedrich 2003, 127). That these networks attained a systemic restructuring character rather than simply a local, situational and contingent one is borne out by the fact that the Polish underground state, formed from politically diverse factions opposed to the Nazi take-over shortly after the invasion of Poland in 1939, crafted the

³ A major converging interest was the elimination of competition with Jewish retail traders and the expropriation or appropriation of Polish Jews' accommodation, property, jobs, businesses and money, driven by agricultural production teams and Polish national-radical movements. Another major converging interest was the anti-communism advocated in the course of the attempt to build up social services in cooperation with the occupying forces. This attempt was embraced by sections of the peasantry, Polish radical nationalist movements, the land-owning nobility and former government functionaries (see Friedrich 2003, 124, 127, 131, 132, 134). In the putative concern to "re-establish and maintain law and order", villagers were being mobilised by village elders, mayors, forestry officials and fire brigadiers to participate in the persecution of their Jewish fellow-citizens (Friedrich 2003, 147).

prototype for the mono-ethnic nation state that was to take shape after the war (Friedrich 2003, 133).

What the bundling of polycracy through the leader principle effected in the fashioning of new instruments of power internal to the *Reich*, we would argue, was what corruption, cooperation, the seizing of opportunities and the forging of connections for comparative advantages and influence, for access to resources and for enrichment (Reichardt and Seibel 2011, 15) led to: the administration and coordination of economic activity in the occupied territories. Such nodal connections made for a dynamic and flexible form of governance (as opposed to more codified forms of bureaucratic proceduralism) in the context of an “unbounded dictatorship”.

Beyond “Polycracy”

Returning to the question of the explanatory purchase of the concept of “polycracy”, we have shown its close implication in National Socialist totalitarianism, whose character of rule it defines. This is in contradistinction to other forms of modern dictatorship, such as the Italian–Fascist corporate state idea (with the “Party above parties” seizing the state machine: see Arendt ([1951] 1994, 258–259) and the Soviet party-state (with its duplication of offices between state and party).

The catalyst to the differentiation of Nazi totalitarianism from the dictatorships in Italy (1922–1943) and the Soviet Union (1926–1953) was what Carl Schmitt described as the quantitatively total state of the late Weimar Republic with its myriad social power complexes. Whereas Johannes Popitz adduced “polycracy” to conceptualise the expanding role of particularist private interests and law in the economy taking over public functions, Carl Schmitt extended and transferred the concept from its application to primarily economic sites to the analysis of political and legal domains in the late Weimar period.

However, the ambit of this analysis of polycracy has remained largely confined to the power dynamics internal to the *Reich*. The dynamic of “cumulative radicalisation” has been slanted functionalistically in the accounts of the exploitation of invaded, annexed or conquered occupied territories in the service of the German war economy. As a result, the political restructuring of societies under occupation remains under-theorised and, along with it, the extent to which the *political dynamics* of polycracy attain a degree of autonomy from polycracy’s *economic functionality* in societies restructured under National Socialist governance. The resulting lacunae have been vastly consequential—not least in the expansive “grey zones” beyond the camps, on the one hand, and the notion of “nations” of victims, on the other (see Gross 2000a; also 2000b, 116).

Addressing these lacunae is a task that this article set itself.

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