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Fixers in Motion. *A Conversation*

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Since taking the editorial helm of *CSSH* in 2006, I have watched several intellectual trends shift and gather momentum. Postsocialist and postcolonial studies are merging into a more generalized interest in the politics of empire. Critical impulses once associated with the "post" approaches have found their way into studies of secularism, conversion, translation, and state effects. Increasingly, these topics are analyzed as transregional processes that operate across religious and political logics. In 2009, our first *CSSH* Conversation dealt with matters of tolerance and conversion in the Ottoman Empire,[1] and in 2010 we filled an entire issue with essays on secularism (52-3). In each case, the ground we explored was contested, but themes of governmentality and moral transformation were central, and the terms of debate were broadly shared.

Equally intriguing, from an editorial perspective, are intellectual trends that surface in the absence of shared doctrinal positions, disciplinary investments, or aesthetic standards of genre. As a sifter and selector of *CSSH* manuscripts, I try to draw attention to these patterns by grouping kindred essays under the

[1] Marc Baer, Ussama Makdisi, and Andrew Shryock, "Tolerance and Conversion in the Ottoman Empire: A Conversation," *CSSH* 51, 4 (2009): 927–40.

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same rubric. I frequently wonder what insights our readers draw from these juxtapositions. To find out, I have invited three *CSSH* authors, Douglas Rogers (an anthropologist), Christine Philliou (a historian), and Craig Jeffrey (a geographer), to engage in a conversation about analytical territory they are exploring in tandem, but without the shared conceptual apparatus that now characterizes, say, the comparative study of citizenship or human rights.

The terrain in question can be described, very loosely, as the zone of overlap between informal social ties, formal structures of statecraft, and the moral dilemmas that arise when people interact across these conceptual spaces or attempt to fuse them. This zone has figured prominently in recent *CSSH* essays on corruption in West Africa,[2] influence peddling in China and Russia,[3] rentier politics and patronage in Saudi Arabia,[4] and family ties as an indicator of state loyalty in the Soviet Union.[5] The inconsistency between normative models of government and a practical knowledge of "how things really work"—or "why things don't work the way they should"—is the theme uniting these essays. Our conversationalists do not take this perceived inconsistency for granted; instead, they show how it is created and managed by political actors of a distinctive kind. For convenience, we call them "fixers."

Douglas Rogers studies the fixer's trade from the vantage provided by his research in the Russian town of Sepych, where much of socialist and postsocialist politics is dominated by the *khoziain* (pl. *khoziaeva*), a figure (part foreman, part political boss, part head of household) who serves his constituents by navigating between back channels and official ones.[6] Rogers' essay in *CSSH* is now part of his monograph, *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Cornell University Press, 2009). The fixers of choice for Christine Philliou are Phanariots, an elite class of Greek Orthodox powerbrokers who dominated the administration of the western Ottoman Empire from the 1600s until the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century.[7] Philliou's account of the rise and fall of the Phanariots is part of her new book, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (University of California Press, 2010). Craig Jeffrey's fixers belong to the class of underemployed Jats who wheel and deal on the

[2] Steven Pierce, "Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria," *CSSH* 48, 4 (2006): 887–914.

[3] Alena Ledeneva, "*Blat* and *Guanxi*: Informal Practices in Russia and China," *CSSH* 50, 1 (2008): 118–44.

[4] Steffan Hertog, "The Sociology of Gulf Rentier Systems: Societies of Intermediaries," *CSSH* 52, 2 (2010): 282–318.

[5] Golfo Alexopoulos, "Stalin and the Politics of Kinship: Practices of Collective Punishment, 1920s–1940s," *CSSH* 50, 1 (2008): 91–117.

[6] Douglas Rogers, "How to Be a *Khoziain* in a Transforming State: State Formation and the Ethics of Governance in Post-Soviet Russia," *CSSH* 48, 4 (2006): 915–45.

[7] Christine Philliou, "Communities on the Verge: Unraveling the Phanariot Ascendancy in Ottoman Governance," *CSSH* 51, 1 (2009): 151–81.

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college campuses of Uttar Pradesh, India, where they acquire expertise in the practice of local corruption and lead campaigns to stamp it out.[8] Jeffrey's essay on Jat fixers is now part of his book, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford University Press, 2010).

In the conversation that follows, we try to make sense of the connections that, across time, space, and political systems, produce fixers. What kind of political actors are they, we ask, and why are they so often portrayed as morally ambiguous? In the end, we suggest that the fixer's unique power is his (yes, all too often it is *his*) ability to improvise, circumvent rules, and blend the status of enemy and friend in ways more sovereign powers cannot. Insofar as these special abilities are of use both to government officials and to ordinary citizens and subjects, the fixer is guaranteed a central place in state governance, but one precariously situated between illegality and the law.

PHILLIOU: Someone steeped in modernization theory (a time traveler visiting us from the 1950s) might read our work and say that we are merely providing close-up examinations of pre-modern political actors. In my case, this is to be expected because Phanariots were active on the "eve of modernization" in the Ottoman Empire. But in your cases, might they look like holdovers from a colonial or even a precolonial South Asian past, or proof that the Soviet experiment was never as "modern" as it claimed to be? I am curious about other frameworks in which to situate fixers. You all do such a great job of depicting the ethical gray areas they occupy, but what more can we say about the resemblances of our fixers across time and space?

ROGERS: One of my concerns is that there is already a powerful and pervasive way of comparing grounded cases such as ours: ranking levels of alleged corruption around the world and pegging them to indicators of democracy. The most widely cited of these rankings is offered each year by Freedom House. In fact, I wonder where Freedom House would place the Ottoman Empire in its corruption ranking in comparison to contemporary Russia and India!

SHRYOCK: Someone might actually attempt that ranking. It is amazing what you can do with a scale and a few universal assumptions. The problem, as it emerges across your work, is that much of what Freedom House would label as dirty politics was considered good stewardship when Phanariots did it. Or it is savvy trouble shooting when a *khoziain* or Jat fixer does it. Good governance often requires bending the rules, and the idea that "the rules" are fair and just is something people constantly dispute. The ethical gray areas do not originate in a misfit between modern and premodern notions of statecraft. Christine is right to want to move away from that idea as quickly as possible.

[8] Craig Jeffrey, "Fixing Futures: Educated Unemployment through a North Indian Lens," *CSSH* 51, 1 (2009): 182–211.

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ROGERS: Yes. Even among contemporary democratic teleologists, "corruption" is not always considered a bad thing. Not so long ago, Samuel Huntington thought corruption and influence-peddling networks were positive signs of an emerging democracy; they were better than the violence he thought characterized authoritarian regimes.[9] That this view is anathema today indicates that important discourses of state and democracy have changed in a relatively short period, even if they are still subsumed in a broader narrative of modern statehood.

JEFFREY: Without wanting to smooth over important differences between the settings we study, what strikes me are the many similarities—family resemblances, perhaps—between Jats, *khoziaeva*, and Phanariots: the key importance of flexibility (discussed in other literature on fixers), their restless energy, and their capacity to work across different fields of power. There may be other links, too: the fixers in our work commonly straddle or blur the boundary between "state" and "society," they seem to some extent reflexive about their socio-political projects, and all appear to be "cosmopolitan" in some important sense (though not always "transnational").

PHILLIOU: They do appear to be crossing from one field, class, ethnic group, region, and even epoch, to another. One could argue that Phanariots occupy a position between "old and new" in the imperial historical narrative, and between imperial and national moments. But I think we should also look at the positive space they open up. Phanariots did not necessarily see themselves as moving across categories. Stephanos Vogorides (1780–1859), born into a Bulgarian-speaking family in the Balkans, went through multiple transformations—ethnic, regional, political, epistemic—on his way to the sultan's court and the Ottoman foreign ministry, but he did not articulate that aspect of his career when he wrote about himself. Instead of a "crosser," he presented himself as a *swimmer*. He describes how, by the grace of God, he was able to "swim through so many dangers." To conceive of oneself as a swimmer is to claim a positive agency, rather than to position oneself in a void "between" institutions, state formations, or social groups.

SHRYOCK: Perhaps the swimmer is not in a void, but he does wants to get out of rough water. One could think of institutions, social groups, or state formations as reference points he uses to navigate. In addition to swimming, I think fixers are very good bridge builders. They make and have connections. In the social world I study in Jordan, fixing is called *wasta*, which means connection. Good fixers connect you to people who can solve your problem, and they jump over all kinds of institutional boundaries to do it.

[9] Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

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JEFFREY: The idea of navigation seems important: plotting a course on shifting terrain. I am especially interested in the Bourdieuian notion of field and how the analogies of "field" and "game" might be used to conceptualize the nitty-gritty of governance in contemporary India, and possibly elsewhere. I spend a lot of time reading youth research, in which scholars tend to imagine people's agency in terms of increased individual autonomy. Yet agency in the case of a Jat fixer seems to involve the cultivation of interdependencies —ties of mutual obligation, reciprocity, and trust—rather than assertion of independence. This is also true of low castes seeking to counter dominant power. Low-caste politicos build up a sense of their own agency through participating in the social networks of the dominant rather than engaging in striking acts of critique. Low castes are sometimes able to subtly change how corruption works in north India through this type of "warrening from within."[10]

SHRYOCK: The model of the dispassionate official who treats all people as equals and is beholden only to the law clearly does not apply to these figures. Yet fixers are often criticized against this abstract standard. That they are obligated in so many directions leads people to suspect that they are up to no good.

PHILLIOU: Perhaps it makes more sense to say that fixers locate their agency in the diverse skills and contacts that enable them to adapt to *other* people's rules—circumstances beyond one's control.

ROGERS: The "swimming" metaphor is persuasive in the Phanariot case, but in the post-Soviet case it is hard to escape the sense of living in between, or at least living "after." Living after an era is precisely what everyone I knew in Sepych understood themselves to be doing in the 1990s and very early 2000s. The locally salient verb for *khoziain* figures after socialism is not to swim or to navigate, but probably to spin (as in rotate)—that is, to feverishly make deals in all directions. The Russian is *krutit'sia*, a verb that is comprehensively covered in Dale Pesmen's *Russia and Soul*.[11]

JEFFREY: The unemployed young men I work with in north India are in between in a triple sense: they are middle class, located between youth and adulthood, and occupy spaces between the metropolitan and rural. Unlike Phanariots, they do perceive themselves to be located in some type of interstitial zone. Indeed, these young men imagine themselves as people "in limbo" or "just waiting." One reason they frame their position in this way is that the region of India they occupy, Uttar Pradesh, is imagined by international organizations and the Indian Government as "in transition" or in some sense "in wait."

[10] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Classes* (London: Victo Gollacz, 1963).
[11] Dale Pesmen, *Russia and Soul: An Exploration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

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I am interested in how the idea of being "betwixt and between" becomes the basis for a young male culture of "hanging out" at street corners. The social and cultural importance of groups of homosocial young men loitering in urban areas has become an important theme recently in African social research and some Asian and Latin American analyses, as well as being an old topic of youth research in the West. In north India, lower middle class young men have used the idea of being in wait to cultivate a sense of male camaraderie. Youth waiting in north India, far from being a passive activity, is actually a key means by which young men develop self-affirming cultures and survive a demoralizing social environment.

Young men find pathways out of waiting by engaging in fixing, acting as social reformers, or entering service-type work in the informal economy.

SHRYOCK: So we add path finding to the fixer's profile, along with all their nautical, engineering, and gyroscopic talents. Clearly, the people you write about are very good at moving around. I think that tells us something important about why fixers proliferate in stratified political systems, and why they are viewed with such ambivalence.

ROGERS: Yes, all of these ways of talking about movement are quite striking. It seems to me that we are not so much working toward a single, underlying metaphor but toward a class of political actions with which fixers are often associated. But I see even more than this in our various articles. Beginning from this focus on motion and movement, we might sketch out three elements of fixing that deserve attention at any particular historical juncture. In rough terms, they are:

- *Verbs of political motion*: the kinds of activity that are valued or particularly significant for making politics work in practice.
- *Social groups or actors of various sorts* that become especially adept at, even identified with, this activity. These may range from a "community on the verge" like the Phanariots to a class or class subset like underemployed Jat students.
- *A set of orienting concepts*, discernable in everything from political ritual to everyday speech, that helps to constitute the cultural field on which political action and social groups intersect.

I don't think any of us deals comprehensively with all of these elements. My own article is more or less silent on how *khoziain* language figured in early post-Soviet class formation. I do, however, draw attention to how the post-Soviet political field is constituted and transformed by the orienting concepts of *khoziain/khoziaistvo. Khoziain* discourse helps make and remake the very perception that a state exists in post-Soviet Russia. Talk about *khoziaeva* helps to *create* the distinction between formal and informal political action, and it colors understandings of what it means to belong to a social group.

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For instance, one of the significant areas of political transformation in early post-Soviet Sepych had to do with the extent to which townspeople conceptualized their relationships with each other primarily through the major local employer—the privatized descendant of State Farm Sepych—or though newly empowered (at least on paper) municipal structures. Debate about whether the director of the farm or the head of the local administration was a more effective *khoziain* was a primary arena in which this political transformation unfolded, with major implications for the course and legitimacy of post-Soviet reforms.

I think Christine engages in a very strong analysis of orienting concepts in her discussion of the Ottoman investiture ceremonies for Phanariot officials. With their careful choreography, assertive public display, and politically saturated symbolism, these ceremonies seem to do much of the same work as does talk about what activities make for a good *khoziain*. That is, these ceremonies concretized and performed the power of the Ottoman Empire. They made real the set of relationships through which Phanariots swam and in which their swimming could be so efficacious.

PHILLIOU: Yes, and those ceremonies also capture the type of political agency we are struggling to articulate—a kind of hybrid between conscious construction and un-self-conscious adaptation of others' constructions.

SHRYOCK: I like the approach you are developing, Doug. It is strong on the kind of conceptual, interpretive analysis that adds nuance to any account of politics. Specifying a class of actions, or actors, is something you all do well, but I would like to hear more about fixing as practice, as craft. The fixers you describe are at their best when engaged in tactics, in real maneuvering. Once the Phanariot is in office, the games begin; in fact, he is in office because games have been played and won on his behalf. One can *talk* about being a *khoziain* all day long—and in Sepych, they do!—but eventually you have to get someone a job or help divert some government funds. How fixers go about their business is fascinating because it is often very hard, in practice or in theory, to agree on the im/morality of what they are doing. Are fixers the enemies or friends of the state, facilitators or saboteurs of good governance? They could be both. That's a conclusion drawn by Ottoman Sultans, Russian villagers, and college administrators in Uttar Pradesh.

I am curious to know how you relate this ambivalence to the habit of linking fixers to corruption, when it is often just as sensible to cast them as people who make the system work, or who work around a system that doesn't work.

JEFFREY: Corruption is such an interesting topic. I do wonder about the question of the normative. How can we problematize Manichean accounts of "good" versus "evil" politics? I try to avoid sanitizing the politics of the lower middle classes in north India while also avoiding the sneering tone that accompanies much recent

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commentary on India's local elites. This is partly because many of the fixers with whom I work are engaged in long-term campaigns against state malpractice even while they collude with government officials on an everyday basis.

I like to think about corruption along three lines: first, as a set of relations and practices that tend on the whole to reproduce the power of local elites and marginalize poorer sections of society; second, as a discourse by which people mark what they regard as acceptable social practice; and third, as a type of intimate culture (*a la* Herzfeld[12]) through which sections of society register and celebrate their political acuity. My emphasis has very much been on the first point: about the connection between corruption and class reproduction. This approach has led me to depict corruption as something that is usually negative, though I think Doug's earlier point about the possible positive benefits of corruption is important, especially where the corruption is more "market" (transparent and impersonal) than "parochial," to recall Jim Scott's distinction.[13] I would make another point, though: showing that corruption must be situated with respect to ordinary practices of individual and class accumulation provides a counterpoint to the post-Washington Consensus tendency to depict corruption as a technical problem characterized by rent-seeking within state institutions. It also strikes me that corruption is at heart an historical idea—it implies some type of "break" from the past.

SHRYOCK: Could you elaborate on that last point?

JEFFREY: In north India the idea of corruption is often embedded in public discourses of moral decay, one infused with melancholy: "thirty years ago, politicians and officials were not like that"—this is the myth. But the notion of the present as distinctively corrupt also generates positive excitement: to participate in corruption is to be "up-to-date," and on the side of history.

ROGERS: I avoid using "corruption" as an analytic term. It just covers too many things that ought to be teased apart and situated in particular times and places: patronage, bribes, selling access, graft, and so on, not to mention countless local terminologies. As an analytic concept, corruption inevitably smuggles in assumptions about the allegedly proper working of a political or economic "system," about what things would be like if they were not, alas, twisted and corrupt. Such assumptions can be more or less veiled, but they tend to be complicit in the discursive constitution and naturalization of economic or political power. A central part of my argument about post-Soviet *khoziain* figures is that states derive a crucial facet of their power from inducing in "their" populations a perception that "the state" exists as a coherent, ordered,

[12] Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[13] James Scott, *Comparative Political Corruption* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

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imposing system. Labeling some set of practices as corrupt versions of what should actually be happening contributes to—rather than exposes—the induced perception that there is, somewhere out there, a coherent system that would function properly if only a certain set of people would just stop misbehaving.

I think there are no such coherent systems to be found in actual practice. It is important to track how variously situated parties work, consciously or unconsciously, to make such systems appear real and powerful. Corruption discourse is a part of this work. Indeed, I would say that talk about corruption is one of the major enablers of the neoliberal economic projects of the past couple of decades.

SHRYOCK: Part of me wants to point out that you, Doug, are actually working in a setting shaped by a rather colossal example of state collapse. The feeling that the state is not really there in the way people pretend, or hope, is empirically correct in Sepych. Coherent systems are ongoing projects, and as such they entail the kind of backdrops and ethical assumptions you are interested in, but the "state effects" you allude to depend as much on what Craig calls the "nitty-gritty of governance"—Bourdieu's games and fields—as they do on orienting concepts or grammatical constraints on discourse. The two approaches fuse very nicely in your respective analyses.

ROGERS: I like Bourdieu's general notion of "field" as a way to situate actors and groups and to watch the totality of their interrelations shift over time. However, I am wary of analytical situations in which important parts of the picture, even constitutive and determinative parts, can be subordinated to strategy in ways that obscure the stakes and contexts of political practice. I think this subordination has implications for how we conceptualize the brand of political operators we are discussing, so perhaps it is worth spelling out how I see this difference of approach (and/or ethnographic context) playing out.

Phanariots in the Ottoman Empire, Jats in Uttar Pradesh, and *khoziain* figures in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia do not completely line up with one another. Indeed, I think that the closest analog in Craig's paper to the concept of "being a *khoziain*" in Russia is not Jats as a group but the concept of *jugar*. Craig translates *jugar* as a "capacity to 'fix things' by bringing together unlike practices or materials,"[14] a definition that lines up almost exactly with a central element of talk about what it means to be *khoziaistvennyi* in Russia. Jat student leaders, Craig argues, find talk about *jugar* particularly useful for making connections and legitimating their various dealings. In his overall analysis, *jugar* appears as the last of several compelling examples of how Jat political strategies (in Bourdieu's sense) are put into action. Here,

[14] Jeffrey, "Fixing Futures": 203.

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the cultural concepts and performances are analytically subordinate to Jat political strategies for reproducing and even deepening class distinctions in new circumstances.

I do something quite different with the family of *khoziain* concepts in post-Soviet Russia. Debate about what it means to be a *khoziain* is constitutive of much of the political field in ways that are not reducible to elements of a strategy. Indeed, my emphasis is almost the inverse of Craig's: I argue that shifting expectations about being a *khoziain* in post-Soviet Sepych provided the ground on which political strategies, tentative as they often were, could be recognized as effective—precisely as you note, Andrew, in the wake of state collapse.

JEFFREY: My project was mainly concerned with charting the reproduction of class dominance, and this is why I emphasize the capacity of rich Jat youth to deploy *jugar* in a strategic manner. But this Bourdieuian approach must be combined with theories that foreground counterintuitive social formations. For example, it is interesting to note that *jugar*—in this case, imagined as a general quality possessed by all Indians—sometimes provided the grounds for cross-caste friendships.

I also think that Doug is right to cite the limitations of the term corruption. What makes it possible to use corruption as a conceptual tool in the north Indian case are two things: First, there is a certain degree of stability in how people in north India imagine corruption. While working in rural and small town India over the past fifteen years, I have found that most people define corruption in roughly the same way as do social science textbooks: as the abuse of public office for private gain. A second reason why it is conceptually convenient to use corruption as an analytical tool where I work is that the various practices associated with abusing public office for private gain—nepotism, requesting bribes, and favoritism—tend on the whole to reproduce the divide between the rich (mainly higher caste) and the poor, who are mainly low castes. I find that corruption is sometimes a convenient shorthand when discussing how and why caste and class inequalities persist, even while I have sometimes problematized the term.

This does not address the important questions that Doug raises about the political implications of corruption-speak. I agree that the language of corruption is often used by powerful organizations and individuals at different scales to justify interventions and practices that harm the poor. There is surely a lot of work to be done on the social construction of corruption to support pernicious goals. But in India the language of corruption does not always support dominant power. For example, there have been some very successful popular movements in India recently that have used anti-corruption as a slogan.

PHILLIOU: There is a connection between "corruption" and class reproduction, or the reproduction of a particular kind of power. But in the Phanariot case, the priority is not to use corruption (that is, patronage, bribery, selling of offices, nepotism—essentially the entire Phanariot repertoire) to keep the

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gates of power closed to outsiders, or commoners. Rather, these practices are used to create and expand a fluid set of circumstances, and to continually bring commoners into the elite strata. Vogorides himself was a perfect example. Even though he was born into a family of relatively modest means, he was, after Hellenizing and gaining a useful set of skills and connections, married into a Phanariot family and was allowed to reach the second-highest office associated with Phanariots—the governor (*kaymakam*) of Moldavia—just on the eve of Greek insurrections in 1821. He brought others from his hometown into these Phanariot networks and helped them find suitable marriage partners and positions. Expansion of the elite was an important strategy for maximizing the reach of the network as a whole, and it was a strategy that appealed to non-Phanariot Ottomans because it gave them a wider range of choices in whom to elevate to a proliferating range of official positions.

This openness to upwardly mobile individuals is symptomatic of a larger Ottoman system of governance. As Michael Meeker points out in *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*,[15] the Ottoman "ruling institution" has been understood, since Max Weber, as a household, or patrimonialist system. Yet "the Ottoman palace was founded on a discipline of face-to-face, person-to-person relationships, one that was unhinged from any local setting or primordial customs and habits. In this respect, it was against family, just as it was against tribe, community, and ethnicity. One did not have to be born into it, and perhaps all the better if one was born out of it."[16] The Phanariot *modus operandi* grew out of this political reality. Individual Phanariots operated both within and between formal institutions set up in the Ottoman "matrix" of governance.

SHRYOCK: Again, we hit this theme of mobility and connection, combined with a strong desire to moralize what is clearly an advantage associated with power and access to power. As we have been conducting this conversation, the Middle East has been rocked by popular uprisings that are driven by a strong, anti-corruption ethos. The forms of corruption denounced in these protests are consistent with the model of corruption Craig is working with. It is possible that the Egyptian demonstrators who drove Hosni Mubarak out of office were helping push forward the neoliberal rationality of our age—in fact, many analysts will produce this argument—but most Egyptians will offer more parsimonious accounts. Most will say they could no longer tolerate a corrupt regime. Western observers predictably interpret this as a step toward modernity and liberal democracy. What they don't see, however, are the deeper structures of moral revolt, and this is because, to invoke Doug's idiom, they

[15] Michael Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
[16] Ibid., 395.

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don't understand assumptions many political actors in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, or Yemen use to activate and interpret change. Many of my Jordanian colleagues who are critical of government corruption offer solutions that parallel the Phanariot model, as Christine describes it. They believe the national elite should extend its connections and benefits into non-elite sectors, instead of monopolizing those assets and making upward mobility impossible for millions of people.

The political genius of fixers is their ability to keep things moving, but they have a fatal attraction to accumulated wealth and power. In many Arab countries, autocratic regimes have been in power for so long that they have effectively co-opted the best fixers—I am reminded of periodic Ottoman attempts to co-opt and officialize their relationship to Phanariots—and they have marginalized or criminalized the rest. The result is inequality of scandalous proportions and rigid political hierarchies that are now breaking apart. Fixers are, at the moment, both identified with the collapsing regimes and leading the charge against them. People are on high anti-corruption alert, but I would imagine that the new orders, once they materialize, will be a paradise for fixers.

JEFFREY: I see obvious parallels in all these settings. It is clear that fixers are centrally preoccupied with social networking and cultural performance (the cultivation of a certain mystique) as bases for accumulation and power. I mentioned earlier that fixers are often seen as "cosmopolitan," although not necessarily in the sense of being transnational.

PHILLIOU: I have reservations about the term "cosmopolitan," but if we accept a general definition that entails multilingualism and openness to other religious, ethnic, and linguistic groups in a regional context, one thing we have to note about all of our cases is that the very quality of being cosmopolitan rests on the existence of a critical mass of people who are monolingual, monoregional, and operationally insular. Vogorides' journey from being a Bulgarian speaker, in his rural context, to being a Greek speaker (and eventually a Turkish, French, and English speaker), and from being a rural dweller to a resident of Istanbul, would have lacked political and social meaning had there not been a large pool of Bulgarian speakers who did not leave their locality and did not have ambitions beyond farming and livestock trading. In this sense, those who became "cosmopolitans" did so not out of a desire for contact with people different from themselves, but to gain access to greater status, power, and wealth by connecting several—insular—groups in the empire. This only begs the question of why some people move out of insular/parochial settings and aspire to greater wealth and influence in the empire.

JEFFREY: In India, young men often cycle between periods of restless activity and long periods of time in which they remain relatively inactive. They often

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change their approach to political practice in response to particular local or family emergencies—the need to pay a dowry for a sister's wedding, or provide for a new wife and child. I have been wondering recently what new conceptual resources might be useful in analyzing the manner in which fixers change tack in response to circumstances, and I have been especially attracted to the idea of "vital conjunctures" offered by the anthropologist Jennifer Johnson-Hanks.[17] Building on an analysis of young women's unwanted pregnancies in Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks argues for a focus on extended durations in a life or lives. A vital conjuncture—a move to a new city, educated unemployment, or the death of a relative, for example—is a period in which structures bear down especially pressingly on people. But it is also one in which new opportunities to challenge existing structures may, paradoxically, come to light.

PHILLIOU: I grapple with a conjuncture of this sort in my book when I discuss the shift to the Tanzimat (the mid-nineteenth century Ottoman reform program) and how Stephanos Vogorides comes face to face with an epistemic crisis in the early 1850s. As circumstances changed and Vogorides, a long-time fixer, found himself at the vortex of the international crisis that led to the Crimean War, he was forced to articulate an explicit identity, to forge an ideology to justify his position as an Orthodox Christian loyal to the Ottoman Empire (though he had been able to survive so many decades by *not* articulating a political position). In the end he was unable to bring about circumstances that would allow his political survival, and the reason for this brings us back, I think, to a characteristic common to our fixers: Vogorides lacked direct access to the force of arms. This is perhaps another way to express the fact that these men did not have the power to create circumstances, but through the cultivation of a certain (and fluid) skill set and interpersonal connections they were amazingly resilient and adaptable to the circumstances that other groups (with access to military force) brought about.

I bring this episode up for two reasons. First, it demonstrates quite clearly that, even when Phanariots enter the world stage, the full range of their actions is never captured (they do not constitute a class, empire, nation, or ethnicity, nor do they own anyone's means of production). Second, I believe this example reveals the coexistence of at least two types of agency Craig has laid out: a long history of interpersonal alliances that are emblematic of "interdependence," and an ability to engage in polemics about national self-determination so as to produce an outcome that will preserve their particular interests.

SHRYOCK: This twinning of interdependence and parochial self-interest brings us back to a claim Craig made earlier in our conversation. He noted

[17] Jennifer Johnson-Hanks, "On the Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography: Toward a Theory of Vital Conjunctures," *American Anthropologist* 104, 3 (2002): 865–80.

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that fixers are often marked by a self-awareness of what they are up to and what they represent to others. Since ambivalence seems to be part of the package we are opening, I wonder what you make of the fixer's desire to be known as such, yet to work behind the scenes?

PHILLIOU: Phanariots relied on a discourse of religious belief (Christian submission and obedience to the Sultan) and imperial loyalty (for the sake of loyalty), which would lead any twenty-first century historian into thinking that they were merely old regime operators in a patrimonialist system. It is when we watch them operate that we see how enterprising they were. Perhaps as much as Jats and *khoziaeva*, they exhibit a "restless energy" but also a resistance to labeling themselves. Vogorides, in hundreds of letters, official documents, and coded memoranda refers to an "us" at times, but never with an ethnic or linguistic marker (such markers are reserved for the many "thems"—Bulgarians, Albanians, Ottomans, even Phanariots as a "them"!). In his world, there are those who have been raised with similar sensibilities (among Orthodox Christian Ottoman subjects), a notion with class connotations perhaps. There are Ottoman ministers who are "ours," who belong to a faction sympathetic to "us." And there are apostates (Greek or any other kind of secessionists). The specific category Vogorides occupies is "loyal subject." His reflexivity about his own operational logic does get articulated, however, when he counsels his son-in-law and protégé to "adjust his language" depending on whom he is speaking to (British, French, Russians, Ottomans).

And here I might ask about the kinds of official language Jats and *khoziaeva* have access to that could support, or cloak, their actions. Phanariots resorted to a language of loyalty and (Christian) servitude when discussing their relationship to the Ottoman sultan and his duty to protect the Christian *re'aya* (flock) in Ottoman domains.

JEFFREY: In 2000, Jats were able to persuade the Uttar Pradesh state government to list them as people belonging to "Other Backward Classes" (OBC) and therefore entitled to reserved seats in educational institutions and public-sector bureaucracies—this despite the fact that most Jats in Uttar Pradesh are comparatively well off. OBC status has not made much difference economically, but it has allowed Jats to depict themselves as people excluded from development goods, and this sometimes provides—at the micro-level—justification for engaging in corruption. For example, Jat student fixers sometimes contrast their own relatively straitened circumstances with the so-called "silver spoon" urban upper caste students, who they say are so rich that they do not need to engage in corruption and *jugar*.

ROGERS: I find that fascinating, Craig. I would guess that this kind of political move is one of a whole set of moves that fixers, collectively rather than individually (if not necessarily acting in concert), might make in modern states. The

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particulars would be different, for instance, but something structurally akin to what you describe seems very plausible for non-ethnic Russian fixers at certain points in the Soviet period. We could imagine other moves for fixers as a group as well. One corner of my current research tracks ways in which the low- and mid-level fixers of the early post-Soviet period—the time covered in my *CSSH* article—were often co-opted by the rapidly expanding Russian federal state after the turbulent 1990s. Vladimir Putin as *khoziain*, and the various institutions his network came to command, enveloped and encompassed many local *khoziaeva*. I think the particulars of this process on the ground, at least in the Perm' Region where I have been working, have a lot to do with the fact that a large portion of the resources for fixers to wrangle came through a fairly narrow set of sources: the hydrocarbon sector. One comparative set for the fate of early-twenty-first century Russian fixers may well be other oil-rich countries (although, given my views on Freedom House rankings, I hope it is clear that I don't think this comparison is best pursued through "resource curse," oil-begets-corruption styles of explanation!). This is a different kind of collective move for fixers than Jats claiming OBC status, but we could see both moves as examples of larger-scale political transformations in which we often find fixers centrally implicated.

SHRYOCK: This might be a good place to conclude our exchange. You have all made interesting claims about the state, but given the centrality of the state as backdrop, I am surprised you haven't said more. We began with a clear suggestion that "the modern state" is both a necessary and a misleading context in which to discuss the art of fixing. As a moralizing agenda, modernization actually creates corruption as it delegitimizes old regimes of diverse kinds—a political effect that renders anti-corruption discourses consistent with other contemporary modes of history-making—but this ideological aspect of modernity can be used by weak and strong alike. The World Bank says no to corruption, but so do ordinary Egyptians in Tahrir Square. I would like you to comment on how fixers themselves play on this tactical ambiguity. As for "the state," Doug actually went for broke, claiming that invocation of the state as a structural ideal often involves sleight of hand, that the state must be conjured into existence, and that fixers (and campaigns against them) are part of this state-making process. One might reasonably conclude that fixers are an essential part of state formation; that nothing would work without them!

PHILLIOU: Actually, it is when the fixers take over that we get pre-Tahrir Egypt. The fixers we are talking about are never the sovereigns. It is when fixer behavior is deployed by the sovereigns that equilibrium is lost. The nepotism of the Mubarak regime, not to mention the nepotism and other forms of "corruption" so endemic in the Greek economy of late, are central examples. In that sense, fixers are an essential part of state formation, as you say, Andrew, but if they are the only part then it seems to lead to an untenable model for politics.

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JEFFREY: One way that fixers justify their collusive activity is to make a distinction between corruption and fraud. Corruption is just how things happen in India at the moment. Fraud is when you pay a bribe and things still don't happen, or when an official comes up with some outrageous new practice that is not part of everyday systems of corruption. At the same time, fixers in Uttar Pradesh are often much more idealistic: as I have mentioned, many continue to campaign against fraud and corruption, even while they are hand in glove with officials. This is because fixers operate with a dual consciousness of the state. On the one hand, they view the state as a corrupt, fraudulent, and unreliable set of institutions—officials and agencies with whom they have to negotiate in order to make money. On the other, they believe in the state as a sublime institution and source of authority and rationality. Like the many young people who have protested recently in North Africa and the Middle East, fixers had the long-term goal of trying to bring the practices of local government officials into line with their notion of an ideal state. This is partly why many of the fixers wanted ultimately to find some type of government job, and they were adamant that their own future children should not have to do *jugar*.

ROGERS: I should point out that, in my original article, I emphasized the invocation of the state as one aspect of a particular institutional context: the aftermath of the Soviet organization of the countryside, which located far more state functions, resources, and power in socialist enterprises like State Farm Sepych than in municipal organs. The post-Soviet attempt to make farms capitalist enterprises and only capitalist enterprises—that is, to municipalize state functions—was the institutional context in which all of this *khoziain* discourse took place. It did not simply float free. Still, I am content with having pushed the issue of how states are talked about, conceptualized, and conjured because social scientists so often seem to revert to the expectation that this sort of analysis might apply to non-modern states or non-Western states, but that the real issue in modern state formation is bureaucratization, rationalization, and so on. I hope we have demonstrated anew how wrong this assumption is. One of the things that has become clearer for me in this conversation is that fixers, as we have been calling them, are an ideal location at which to explore the mutual implications of different aspects of state formation. Fixers are major players in the making of new strategies (those political verbs of motion) and new institutions. At the same time, it is often precisely around fixers that new ways of invoking "the state" are debated and, in certain conditions, coalesce—or crumble.

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