

Transition Societies and Forms of the Phenomenon of Corruption

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Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.	<p><i>This article examines the structural interconnection between processes of transition in human societies and the forms of corruption that emerge within and exert impact upon, them. Through an analytical engagement with the concept of transition and the nature of the corruption phenomenon, as well as with the points of genesis and typologies of transitional processes, the article elucidates the reasons underpinning the linkage between transitions and the forms of corruption. It further outlines the necessary scientific trajectory and methodological orientation required for such an analysis, together with the expected analytical outcomes. Finally, the article highlights the epistemic rationale and the professional role that a contemporary sociologist ought to assume, both in preparing populations for transitional processes and in managing the interrelation between these transitions and the forms of corruption within a given social polity.</i></p>
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Introduction

The term *transition* is frequently framed by a variety of qualifying adjectives, such as green transition, smooth transition, digital transition, energy transition, just transition, political transition and economic transition. A parallel semantic trajectory characterizes the term *crisis*, despite the substantial conceptual distinctions separating the two notions and despite the fact that scholars from diverse disciplines are often required to address the question of when a transition turns into a crisis and when, conversely, a crisis evolves into a transitional process.

Prior to clarifying the conceptual content of the term *transition*, several preliminary observations are necessary. Climate change may acquire the characteristics of an environmental crisis; a pandemic may generate a public health crisis; actors who exploit forms of corruption within the structures and operational mechanisms of the globalized system invariably retain the capacity to trigger an economic crisis; armed conflicts, whether limited or extensive, produce geopolitical crises. Furthermore, the multi-layered evolution of populations, in conjunction with the structural and enduring weaknesses of liberal democracies, lays the groundwork for leadership crises[1] and in certain social formations, for institutional crises.

Although crises of this kind may signal the onset of a transitional process, their conceptual meaning must not be conflated with that of transition itself. One of the risks inherent in such a conflation is entrapment within an emerging framework of purported opportunity, such as the economic crisis, which certain theoretical approaches have sought to reframe as a catalyst for renewal. As will be demonstrated below, the fact that a transitional process unfolds over a prolonged temporal horizon does not imply the transformation of the social formation experiencing it into a condition of “permanent crisis,” nor into a social formation in which managed crises crystallize into “creeping normalities.” Such transformations often occur through palliative practices directed toward the population, while simultaneously reinforcing domestic and transnational economic structures, as is the case with consumption-driven stabilization.

Accordingly, the concept of transition gives rise to a series of demanding questions, both in terms of their formulation and the complexity of their answers. These questions include: what does the term *transition* signify? Does it pertain to individual nation-states, to the global system, or to both simultaneously? Are there prerequisite conditions that propel a country, a continent, or the planet as a whole

into transitional processes, and what is the temporal horizon of such trajectories? Do transitions unfold as relatively smooth or profoundly arduous processes, producing large or small, perceptible or imperceptible shifts in the socio-economic and political landscape? Do transitional processes occur automatically, and how are they affected by technological developments (artificial intelligence, the decline of the oil era, energy transition, transition to a low-carbon economy, productive fusion), by cultural transformations, and by emergent forms of threat (climate change, new forms of terrorism)? Are there specific types of transitions that social formations across the globe will be required to manage in the near future? What does transition signify in the political and economic domains of a country, and how are these dimensions managed at the social level? Finally, how are all these elements reflected in divergent modes of coexistence and civilization among nation-states worldwide?

A contemporary sociologist must grasp the critical importance of both posing these questions and addressing them, at both the planetary level and the level of individual nation-states. What is certain, however, is that the scientific complexity of managing these issues increases exponentially once they are analytically linked to the phenomenon of corruption and to its specific forms within each social formation. This raises a fundamental and demanding question: why is it necessary to establish a connection between the forms of corruption and the processes and types of transition? Do forms of corruption determine, to a greater or lesser extent, the initiation, evolution, and outcome of a transitional process? Might a researcher, by understanding the *ideal type of corruption* of a given country and its *population profile of homo corruptus*, [2] as well as identifying which forms of corruption are generated, utilized and imposed within that context, be able to delineate causal boundaries and assess the outcomes of a transitional process? Given that addressing these questions presupposes a clear understanding of both the phenomenon of corruption and the meaning of transition, it is first necessary to draw upon the relevant theoretical corpus concerning the definition of corruption, the notion of forms of corruption, the concept of the ideal type of corruption and the population profile of *homo corruptus*. [3]

Corruption constitutes a phenomenon-a human construct observable in all countries of the world, irrespective of geographical region, historical period or cultural paradigm. It must therefore be understood through its definition: “corruption pertains to a human phenomenon encompassing a set of forms that vary across countries in terms of their origins, scope and consequences”. [4] Within this framework, the manifestations of corruption that is, its

forms, are not anomalies but human actions embedded in historical continuity. A form of corruption corresponds to a specific historical reality, situated in time and space, reflecting an individual pursuit materialized through action and producing a tangible impact. [5]

The *ideal type of corruption* functions as a scientific instrument in the hands of the researcher. By analyzing the logic of pursuits, the rationality of actions and the validity of impacts shaping the forms of corruption within a given social space, it provides an epistemological orientation for identifying strategies of management and intervention. This ideal type does not represent the phenomenon in its empirical totality; rather, it delineates the dynamic points that, through analytical selection, define the phenomenon’s specific differentiations within the structure under examination. [6] It is directly linked to the *population profile of homo corruptus*. Since corruption is a human phenomenon, it cannot be attributed to an abstract notion of “man,” but only to humans in their plural, social existence. Within this context, corruption directed solely toward oneself is conceptually meaningless, as isolation precludes perception of the phenomenon. Social scientists generally agree that once humans entered social formations, they simultaneously emerged as *homo politicus*, *homo economicus*, and *homo sociologicus*—that is, as inherently political, economic and social beings acting within rational, goal-oriented, and socially structured frameworks. [7]

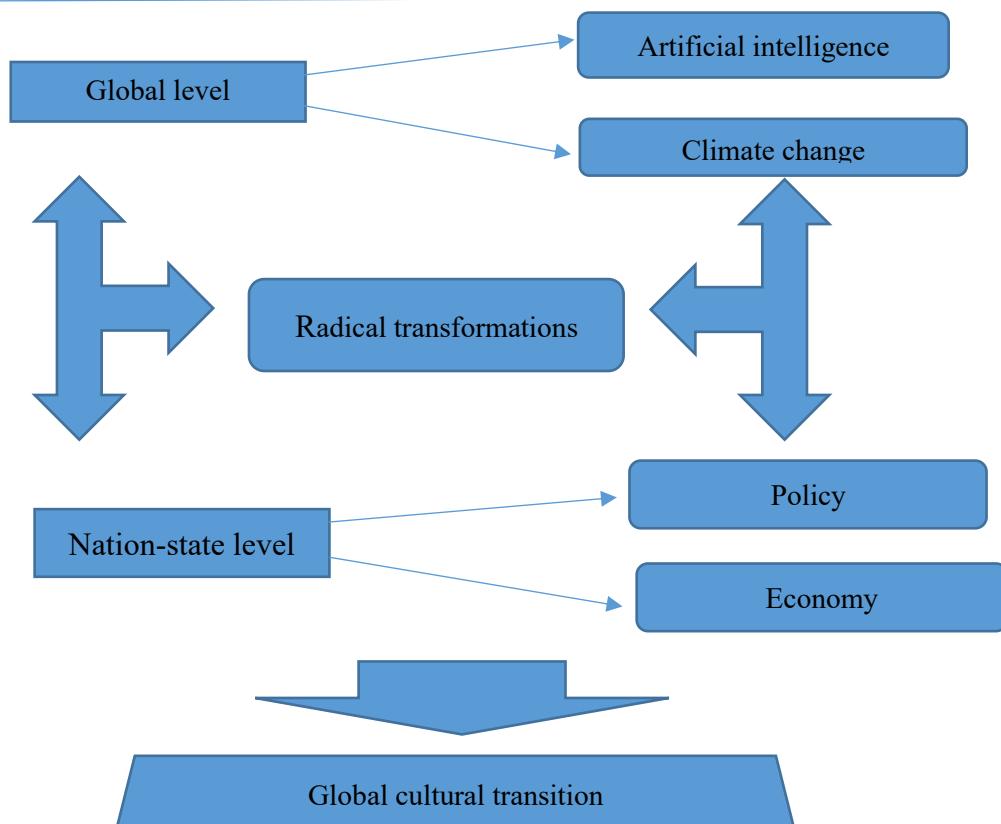
The question of why a contemporary sociologist studying a transitional process must connect the forms of corruption with both the sources and the type of transition admits a clear answer: forms of corruption decisively shape, to varying degrees, the initiation, evolution and outcome of transitional processes. Empirical data concerning a country’s ideal type of corruption, its population profile of *homo corruptus* and the specific forms of corruption that emerge, are utilized, and exert effects within it, enable the researcher to delineate causal mechanisms and assess transitional outcomes in a methodologically sound manner. Such an analytical endeavor, however, requires heightened vigilance against a series of methodological and epistemological traps. These include the personal “conceptual imprints” of individual “intellectuals of corruption,” the distorting role of international organizations and disciplinary claims of conceptual “ownership” of corruption among economists, jurists, political scientists and criminologists. [8] Additional pitfalls arise from the unscientific promotion and deployment of indices, [9] related to corruption, which often shift from analytical tools to drivers of generalized quantification, yielding questionable scientific applications and conclusions. Overcoming these traps requires both a clear articulation of the researcher’s role and objectives and

a rigorous command of the axioms underpinning the theory of corruption. [10]

With regard to the concept of transition, scholars ranging from historians and economists to paleontologists converge on the view that the evolution of life and of social formations is non-linear. Major evolutionary leaps have occurred periodically under the pressure of endogenous and exogenous factors. Conceptually, transition refers to a condition or process of evolution, a passage from one stage to another across political, economic and social domains and to a preparatory process through which populations and their governing agents are oriented toward a new state of affairs. A defining prerequisite for characterizing such a process as a transition is the presence of radical transformations unfolding over an extended temporal

horizon, whether for a social formation, a country or an entire continent. A transitional period thus constitutes a distinct phase in the evolution of one or more social spaces, during which new relations emerge, altering their structural configuration. A transitional trajectory is therefore a prolonged and often arduous process that produces profound changes in the socio-economic and political fabric of a social space. It does not unfold automatically: except in cases of major natural disasters, its initiation is not the inevitable outcome of natural evolution but the result of deliberate human action and leadership strategies. Transition, as a specific form of evolution approaching the threshold of historical transformation, constitutes a concrete outcome: the differential between intended objectives and the results ultimately achieved.

Figure 1: The Global Era of Transitional Processes



A transitional process may unfold at three distinct levels: at the global level, at the level of the nation-state, or simultaneously at both. Consequently, the first step in the analytical mapping of a transition, concerns the understanding of its point of genesis. This immediately raises the issue of identifying the possible points from which a transitional process may originate.

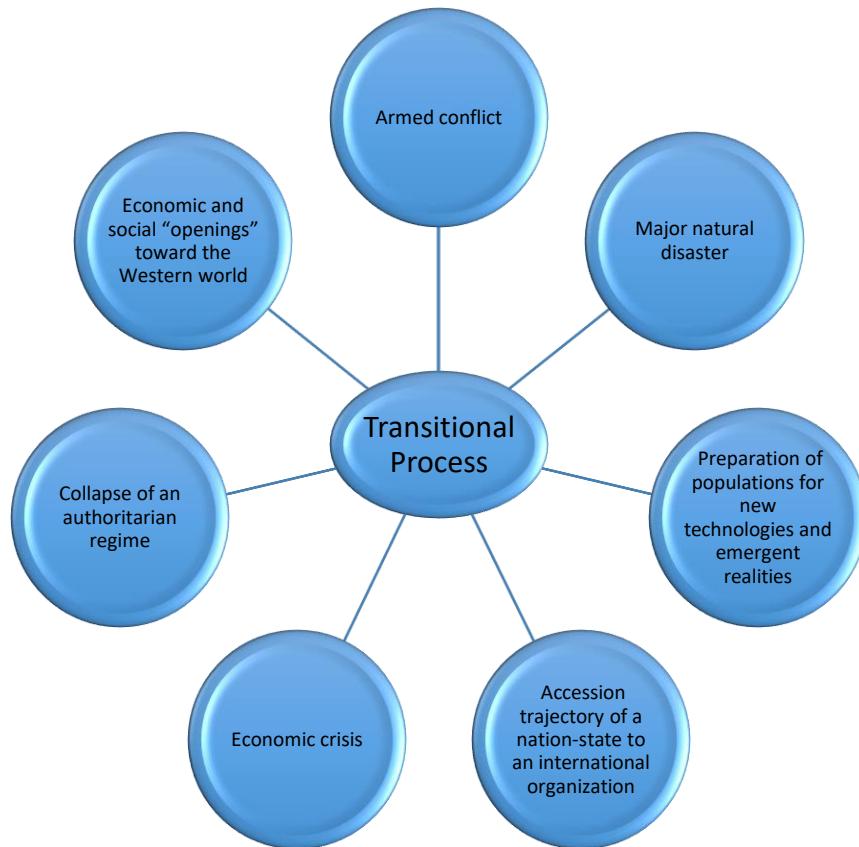
In this respect, a first point of genesis may involve the collapse of an authoritarian regime and the transition of a social space toward democracy, that is, a process of democratization. A second point of genesis, may consist of an economic crisis that leads a nation-state into bankruptcy and external fiscal surveillance. A third point of genesis,

may relate to the so-called economic and social “openings” toward the Western world. A fourth possible point of genesis concerns the accession trajectory of a nation-state to an international organization: a trajectory that prescribes a prolonged period of structural reforms and their attendant outcomes. A fifth point of genesis of a transitional process, may involve the preparation of populations for new technologies and emergent realities, such as artificial intelligence and virtual societies. A sixth point of genesis, pertains to the occurrence of a major natural disaster. The final possible point of genesis of a transitional process, can be none other than the outbreak of armed conflict. In this context, the case of Ukraine is emblematic of the

interconnection between a transitional process –war- and the forms of the corruption phenomenon: an interconnection that yields critical data concerning the causes, originating both from Ukraine's internal and external environment, that triggered this violent transitional process, namely war. More specifically, forms of the corruption phenomenon such as the corruption of interstate relations, political corruption, bribery and the corruption of

pressure groups provide compelling empirical and analytical evidence regarding the initiation of this violent transition. These data are, of course, situated within the broader geopolitical framework of the expansion and reconfiguration of the spheres of influence of the major powers (United States, Russia, China) extending from Europe to Northeast Asia.

Figure 2: The Points of Genesis of a Transitional Process



Through this initial step of understanding the point of genesis of a transitional process, the scholar apprehends one of its fundamental characteristics: namely, that its temporal horizon, irrespective of its point of genesis, is invariably long. In practical terms, this implies that a researcher's academic and professional trajectory may be largely expended in the specialization he or she elects to pursue (through study, proposal, evaluation and verification) within a particular dimension of a transitional trajectory. Consequently, the issues upon which the researcher chooses to focus, both analytically and professionally, as well as the manner in which this choice is made, become critically significant.

The scholar is thus led to the second step in the analytical mapping of a transition. This step concerns the requirements of the anatomy of a transitional process, articulated through four analytical factors, which are examined below. The third dimension of the analytical

mapping of a transitional process, however, pertains to the constellation of factors constituting the surrounding environment of a population undergoing such a process. This constellation includes value systems, religious beliefs, national ideologies, prevailing cultural conditions and transformations (cultural paradigms and cultural mobility), the configuration and management of power, the economic framework, the relations formed among different communities, the corruption ideal type, the population profile of homo corruptus and the forms of corruption characterizing that population.

With particular regard to the corruption ideal type, the population profile of homo corruptus and the forms of corruption within a population undergoing a transitional process, the data composing these elements possess an additional and critically important dimension. This dimension reflects the reasons why the study of the corruption phenomenon acquires particular analytical

weight in transitional processes. These reasons relate, on the one hand, to those factors that influence and co-constitute the elements signaling a transitional process of any point of genesis and on the other hand, to those that affect its evolution and determine, to a lesser or greater extent, its outcome.

All these factors must simultaneously be situated within the international and/or regional system to which the specific social polity belongs, so that the analytical background of such processes is enriched by their international dimension. From this complex and often interrelated ensemble of factors, the scholar evaluates those that either facilitate or obstruct the unfolding of a transitional process and its eventual completion.

This brings to the fore the issue of organizing the temporal dimension of a transitional process: an issue that relates, on the one hand, to the scientific criteria adopted by the researcher and, on the other, to the manner in which this temporal framework becomes analytically discernible and partially autonomous. The management of the temporal boundaries of a transitional process is neither neutral nor arbitrary, precisely because it is shaped by the researcher's interpretive standpoint.

With regard to the four analytical factors constituting the anatomy of a transitional process, the first concerns the theoretical grounding of the research, so that it does not devolve into a mere accumulation of case-based descriptions. The second factor concerns the collection of the necessary diagnostic material, that is, sources. These first two factors underscore the fact that during historically non-linear periods, theory and science are often caught unprepared by the developments that trigger and follow the onset of a transitional process. Under the pressure of time and unfolding events, recourse is frequently sought in earlier cultural constants or in external models, with the provisional aim of bridging analytical gaps and mitigating the various forms of indeterminacy generated by a transitional process. Temporal pressure, however combined with the inability to apply the clause of conciliation [11] and the turn toward earlier cultural constants or foreign models tend not to bridge but to deepen the gap and not to mitigate but to amplify indeterminacy.

In this manner, the scholar proceeds to the third analytical factor in the anatomy of a transitional process: the ordeal of evidence and data, aimed at avoiding casuistic misinterpretations and mimetic distortions. The systematic collection of evidence concerning the social space in which a transitional process unfolds brings into focus the fourth analytical factor, which is articulated through the theoretical deployment of the theory of the corruption phenomenon within that social space.

This theoretical deployment equips the scholar with a broad spectrum of scientific tools, ranging from the identification, evaluation and prioritization of the causes initiating a transitional process within a given social space, [12] to the determination of those forms of corruption that shape, to a greater or lesser extent, the character, trajectory and outcomes of that transition.

In utilizing these four analytical factors, the scholar comes to recognize that a transitional process, by virtue of its extended temporal horizon, often acquires characteristics of permanence. It thus generates among populations emotions such as insecurity, dissatisfaction, disappointment, anger, resentment, indignation, distrust, suspicion, feelings of injustice, fear and impatience. Revisiting one of the initial questions concerning what it means to live within a transitional process, the scholar observes that during such periods historical time contracts and expands, the future becomes uncertain, and those experiencing these conditions often resort to elements of their past in order to manage the progressive erosion of certainties as they existed prior to the onset of the transition.

Given the nature of transitional processes, the entities involved and the diversity of their points of genesis, any typology of transitions must simultaneously contribute to the formation of a theory of transitions and remain inherently open-ended. A first type of transition may be defined as a "transition of entities", referring to radical transformations in the identity of the entities composing a national or international system. A second type may be defined as a "systemic transition", encompassing changes in resources, organizational structures, and modes of control, dependency and governance. A third type may be defined as a "transition of interactions", referring to transformations in the interactions among entities within an existing regional or international system.

The distinction among these types is analytically necessary but empirically non-trivial. Transitions of entities often entail systemic changes and transformations in interactions, while classification depends on the level of data aggregation and analytical resolution adopted by the researcher. These types may never manifest in pure form, yet one may predominate at a given historical moment. For this reason, they may serve as critical analytical instruments within a future theory of transitions.

If such a theory were to be articulated, it would primarily seek to examine the reasons and causes prompting populations to conclude that the achievement of their objectives is better secured through new political, economic, social and institutional arrangements. It would focus on how technological, economic and other transformations reshape power relations and aspirations within social polities, enabling shifts in behavior, roles and

institutions. The formulation of such a theory is methodologically demanding, given the uniqueness, complexity and unpredictability of transitional periods. While the identification of recurring patterns or tendencies across social spaces may assist in this endeavor, predicting the scope and outcomes of radical transformations remains exceptionally difficult. A theory of transitions would therefore necessarily integrate perspectives ranging from sociological and economic theory construction to theories of imperialism and cultural integration.

2. Conclusion

Within the analytical framework developed above, it becomes evident that the economic rise of Asian societies has not been predicated on the importation of Western cultural models, but on the preservation and strategic activation of indigenous cultural paradigms. Cultural coherence and power thus operate in a reciprocal relationship. In the contemporary international system, this reconfiguration of local power has constrained the capacity of international organizations, such as the United Nations, to manage transitional conflicts effectively. Consequently, governance has shifted toward culturally hegemonic states operating within their respective regional arenas, including Turkey, Israel, Russia and China. This raises the question of whether Greece, as a Christian country in the Balkans, could pursue a comparable trajectory by extending its power beyond material domains toward cultural empowerment and cultural predominance. The paradox of the contemporary era of transitions lies in the coexistence of global technological and economic integration with localized cultural dominance. This configuration gives rise to a global constellation of *local cultural hegemons*, characterized by internal cohesion, preservation of cultural imprint and boundary demarcation. According to the theory of the corruption phenomenon, the forms of corruption are products of human culture. Local or regional hegemonies therefore entail the predominance of specific corruption ideal types and population profiles of homo corruptus. The decisive question for contemporary sociology concerns whether, at the conclusion of the current era of transitions driven by artificial intelligence and climate change, power will continue to be anchored in data sovereignty and cultural paradigms and which forms of corruption will articulate that power and operate as its binding mechanisms.

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