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C o n f e r e n c e a g e n d a

F r i e n d s

P a t r o n s

F o l l o w e r s

Practices, discourses and semantics of friendship
and patronage in historical, anthropological and
cross-cultural perspectives

Thursday, July 23



Friendship put to the test - friendship in crisis

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Ambiguous representations of friendship in medieval and early modern epic literature

Right up until the 16th century the number of German language texts in which friendship appears remains limited. A surprising number of these texts –which in itself provides a preliminary overview– recount how friendship is put to the test or how it ends up in crisis. These findings call for straightforward sociohistorical explanations; in particular such explanations will allow the precarious status of friendship as a freely chosen form of socialization, as well as its difficult relation to kinship, to come to the fore. Nevertheless, the application of appropriate explanatory models may sometimes follow too hastily –a point I wish to discuss. Since one should first bear in mind how narrative texts of the middle ages and of the early modern period are able to dramatize friendship at all. I see three basic possibilities for the period in question:

1. the outward affirmation/claim of friendship
2. the threat to friendship from the inside
3. the avowal of friendship in words

The third possibility first presents itself in the early modern novels of Georg Wickram, in which the designation of friendship adopts, for the most part, the language of love. The narrative potential is thus limited, since the discourse about friendship is not specific enough to the subject. In contrast, should friendship become a subject –which, according to Jurij M. Lotman, depends upon a crossing of spatial-semantic boundaries– then only the two first options remain available: the outward affirmation/claim of friendship –as enacted in friendships among warriors– and its threat from inside –through tests of loyalty, intrigues, etc. If the observation, according to which the number of subjects is limited to such an extent, proves correct, the question then becomes, how much weight to assign to the interpretation of their appearance in the text. In any case, research which sheds light on the presentation of friendship on the surface of the text should be aware that there are in fact only two fundamental possibilities in the narration of friendship: its vindication or its breakup.

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Friends or amici

Amicitia and monastic letter writing in the 12th century

Monastic friendship literature in the Central Middle Ages has been interpreted primarily in two ways. Firstly, it has been seen as the exploration of personal, sentimental attachments between individuals; this approach has dominated studies of monastic friendship and has also been associated with theories of the origins of individualism. Secondly, it has been read as a language conveying political or wider social bonds and obligations; this approach treats friendship as an extension into the 'public sphere' or political arena of interpersonal bonds. Drawing on work on lay and aristocratic friendship networks, and developing from earlier theories of, for example, allegiance-friendship and the *Personenverbandsstaat*, this approach categorises friendship relationships as 'instrumental' or 'affective'. In the case of monastic letter collections, however, neither of these approaches can be adequately supported by the evidence.

This paper will look comparatively at the evidence for the uses of the terms *amicitia* and *amicus* drawn from detailed studies of a range of important monastic letter collections in twelfth-century France, including those of Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter the Venerable, Nicholas of Clairvaux and Peter of Celle. These writers shared a common understanding of *amicitia* which does not fit easily with modern interpretations of friendship. Very few studies have been made of the uses of the terms *amicus* and *amicitia* across entire letter collections; rather the focus has been on particular and atypical examples of correspondence and unusually elaborate literary expositions of friendship. It can be shown, however, that the terms *amicus* and *amicitia* were not typically semantic markers for intimacy, or for extended or fictive interpersonal relations, but for distance, tension and uncertainty. They also occupied a unique place in the epistolary address system, and were used in different contexts from terms often treated by historians as cognates or synonyms, such as *amor*, *dilectio* and *affectus*. Letters commonly described by historians as 'friendly' or as 'letters of friendship' (i.e. those which were written with no other explicit purpose than to convey amicable sentiments, profess love or exchange spiritual exhortations) rarely use *amicus* or *amicitia*. *Amici* were not included among close personal relations but were a separate group; intimacy had different semantic markers, and for an intimate to be called an *amicus* often represented not inclusion but exclusion or separation from the writer's inner circle.

This has important implications for our understanding of political network formation, both in terms of the origins of those relationships and their practical consequences. The circles and networks of friendship that have been identified through the evidence of letter collections were not extensions of interpersonal relationships but seem to reflect separate and parallel strategies of network formation. They were cultivated often in institutional and collective contexts and had particular relevance in the cultivation of diplomatic relations between different monastic orders and the promotion of the material interests of those orders.

Discourses of power and friendship in in epic courtly literature

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Marke and Tristan

The story of Tristan and Isolde and their betrayal of Marke is a popular subject in medieval literature, with a long legacy which shows a great interest in the tragic love story. In addition to the fate of the lovers, however, the role of the king has often been discussed and reinterpreted. Marke's relation to Tristan has been read in terms of kinship or as a literary representation of friendship between king and favorite, as well as a latent homoerotic relationship. Discourses of power, personal engagement, and loyalty at court seem interwoven in this relation and make it a special case of male bonding.

The paper will focus on the different and ambiguous aspects of this relation between king Marke and his nephew and favorite Tristan in Gottfried's von Straßburg Tristan. In order to arrive at a more complex understanding of the text and the literary configuration of political friendship, I will also discuss non-fictional works which deal with the problem of life and personal relations at court, like John of Salisbury's Policraticus, Walter Map's De nugis curialium and Johannes de Hauvilla Architrenius. Among the questions I seek to answer are: which traditional ideas of friendship seem to be a point of reference? Is it possible to recognize new patterns which can be a hint of a changed understanding of friendship due to courtly culture? The answers proceed from a recognition of the court as a central place of high medieval culture, whose complex social and political relations were the principal focus of textual representations of power, friendship, kinship, and loyalty.

The new courtly romances created in the second half of the twelfth century prompt interesting questions from an anthropological perspective since these texts discuss matters of topical interest as a function of the moral-ethical code of their day. Therefore it seems to be necessary to look at these literary texts from a historical-anthropological perspective and to employ theological works or court critics, for example, in order to arrive at the relevant contexts and to get a general account of historical discourses of friendship.

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Formation of masculinities and political identities in Lebanon

My paper will engage in an anthropological discussion with the crucial importance of the relationship with political leaders in defining social relationships and shaping the particular significance for being a young man in Lebanon.

Lebanon is traditionally depicted as a confessional society where every single political or administrative position is allowed according to one's religious community – there would be a quota for each community. But it is hardly said that positions are also granted based on one's political allegiance inside his/her community. However, being a “follower” doesn't mean that one has to actively support a political leader. Rather, it has to be considered an inherited form of ascription, as crucial as religion in defining one's social identity.

While doing fieldwork in Lebanon, I was struck by the omnipresence of the reference to the leader and to the political situation in everyday conversations and practices. It was astonishingly inescapable, whatever topic was discussed. After I recognized the overwhelming presence of that reference in everyday life, I refocused my attention to the study of the complex and multifaceted relationship people tend to build with the dominant political figure of the region they live in or the religious community they belong to. In the Shuf Mountain, this led me to investigate the legacy and style of the Junblat leadership. The Junblat are an old political household tracing their leadership back to the beginning of 17th century. Their stronghold is still regarded as some sort of feudal legacy.

After having set up the Lebanese context, I will focus on specific features of patron-clients relationships in Lebanon. My ethnographic data on the druze community and Walid Junblat's followers revealed that there is a range of various attitudes towards political leaders, depending on whether a man is fully recognized as an accomplished adult or is still a young man. Adults express deference when referring to the leader and the relationship is organized in a way that constantly reaffirms a subordinate distance. The relationship young followers establish with political leaders is totally different. It is organized in an intimate way. I will show how, by getting closer to the political leader, young people construct their communal and political identities. This closeness enables them to tackle their future responsibilities as adults and heads of families.

Beyond European concepts

Practices of friendship in New Zealand and Indonesia

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In our paper we attempt to look beyond the prevailing European conceptions of friendship that reverberate in the existing academic discourse. Drawing on ethnographic data collected in New Zealand (Agnes Brandt) and Indonesia (Eric A. Heuser), we set out to explore the socio-cultural diversity of friendships by investigating practices within their respective socio-political and -cultural contexts. At the core of our analysis are individual friendship experiences by New Zealand Maori and Indonesian actors. Particular attention is given to the interrelation of socio-cultural background and individual practice, both within and across cultural boundaries.

Our data suggests the co-existence of multiple notions of relatedness and interaction in both societies. In their cross-cultural friendships, indigenous actors often have to juggle these different conceptions and associated friendship norms. Rather than automatically leading to the construction of hybrid cultural spaces, the process of negotiating difference is often one of de- and reconstructing individual boundaries. This, as we will argue, is owed to the relatively informal and open character of friendship relations, which allows for difference across various social dimensions.

Rather than providing a comprehensive comparison of friendship practices in New Zealand and Indonesia, we are aiming at a critical juxtaposition of (g)localised practices and notions of relatedness. By doing so, we will highlight the importance of a critical reading of friendship that accounts for the specific socio-historical and -cultural setting and propose to expand the European ideal of friendship in favour of a more inclusive concept.

Friday, July 24



Birth, death and resurrection

The philosophers Ancient Greek and Roman when trying to work out the best political systems for running states, in the interests of their citizens, included reference to the role of friendship. However, for most political scientists at the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of friendship seems unconnected to any public role. Nevertheless, there has been recently an escalating rise in interest within many academic disciplines, including politics, of the role of friendship in society and in civil and political life.

This address will trace the birth, death and resurrection of writings on the concept of friendship and politics in the Western tradition, in a very condensed historical story which will incorporate an explicit feminist analysis. This will trace the philosophical writings from the Ancient Greeks and Romans, through Medieval Christianity, to the Enlightenment, where modern democracy developed to deliberately exclude friendship.

I will be attempting to identify some of the influences which have lead to a burgeoning in the literature on friendship. I will be arguing that this resurrection has occurred as a result of the emphasis on the importance of relationships in a number of inter-related but separate political and philosophical developments, including the discipline of psychology, the women's movement and gender theory, communitarianism, post-modernism and post-colonialism.

The importance of both interdisciplinary and intercultural research on friendship is emphasized. There is no suggestion that the ancient model should be replicated in our increasingly complex societies, but I will be suggesting that in order to reinvigorate the concept of the political, friendship needs to be examined as a way of making connections and re-engaging with each other.

Friendship in ancient greek myth

Homer's Iliad

This paper deals with the cold-blooded manipulation and wily abuse of the deep and well known friendship in Homeric verse, that most popular one of Achilles and Patroclus, by old Nestor, a cunning colleague in the inner circle of power within the troubled Achaean contingent having laid siege to Troy.

“The son of a crumbled father, the son of all nations ...“

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Poststructuralism's model of friendship and migration in American literature

With Jacques Derrida's "Politiques de l'amitié" "friendship" has proved itself central to post-structuralist political thinking. But as a concept which tends to decentralize and undermine the transcendencies and hierarchies of family and state it more or less implicitly occurs throughout all French theory from Bataille to Barthes, Foucault, or Deleuze. Thus, the latter's "Bartleby, or the Formula" identifies the notion of friendship as matrix and foundation agreement of the United States: Whereas the Old World incessantly repeats its "tree structures" and "oedipal histories", America invents itself as a nation of immigrants – horizontally, without a father – and only loosely combines its individuals. But like socialism, this migrants' utopia which always has to balance the precarious equilibrium between associating and differentiating aspects in a society of friends must lean either towards institutional closure and petrification – the "Lightning Conductor Man" Benjamin Franklin's "magnetic American prison" – or the final drifting apart of its elements.

The paper pinpoints this poststructuralist concept in American literature: Gilles Deleuze himself calls Walt Whitman and Herman Melville as early witnesses who artistically realize the call "Immigrants of all nations, unite!" and at the same time put the tension between the unifying bonds of a contract and the diverging force of the individual into literary practice: thematically as well as by means of their respective formal eclecticism or paratactic style the texts become legible as images of an alternative social structure of friends / migrants which does no longer rely on the European model of unity, origin and descent. Whereas similar topics and techniques can be found in American literature throughout high modernism (Gertrud Stein) or postmodernism (William H. Gass), the paper wants to focus on the Russian-American writer Charles Reznikoff's epic poem "Testimony: The United States (1885-1915) Recitative".

Reznikoff's text assembles countless passages from archived legal records, thereby producing a panoramatic view of classes and migration in the US. Thus, the poem's content and form exemplify the principle of the loose association of heterogeneous elements that runs through the poststructuralist discourse of friendship as well as the initial American design of a migrants' community.

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Enmity among early modern noble men

Our work in Freiburg over the past three years has mainly concentrated on friendship and patronage both among elites and other social groups throughout the ages, less so on conflict and hostility between persons or social groups. However in my paper today I shall look less at friendship than at the opposite phenomenon, enmity or hostility, and in particular at its violent manifestations especially in duels. Whereas from the later 18th century friendship was increasingly identified with intimacy, enmity and friendship in the preceding centuries were two opposing poles and the one phenomenon was to some extent a mirror image of the other. Moreover just as friendships at least among the elite had often political implications and were far more than merely private affairs, enmities could involve entire families sometimes over several generations including their patrons and clients. In the same way in which one could inherit friends one could inherit enemies. Such enmities often found their outlet in violent conflicts and in particular in duels. In the 18th century duels were often fought for the most trivial reasons. Thus according to the Comte de Tilly, when two intimate friends had a discussion which was slightly livelier than usual and which was overheard by ladies. They have no choice they have to kill each other if the ladies pretend that one of them was insulted by the other, even if they themselves do not feel the least bit insulted. Thus friendship as much as enmity was often far more than a relationship between merely two persons. More frequently a third party or several third parties were involved either as observers who provided an audience for the interaction between the two partners or as councillors and advisors but also as go-betweens and intermediaries or alternatively as trouble-makers, whose interventions provided a possible source of friction. In a society where honour was so important for social identity and status, this outside audience played a crucial role in transforming friendship into enmity or the other way round.

On the other hand this ability nobles showed to react so quickly to perceived slights or imagined insults presupposed a society in which at least men and women of a certain social status never treated each other as complete strangers. Although in actual fact they were strangers, some sort of friendship or rather friendly sociability was always possible and assumed even among men and women who knew each other only superficially. However enmities could just as easily develop. In fact, Pierre Serna has argued that the duel was one of the elements which gave coherence to noble society, in the sense that conflicts as long as they are fought out according to certain rules present in themselves a certain kind of social relationship. They create ties between persons who would otherwise be complete strangers totally indifferent to each other.

„We have not fail'd to remember you on all occasions & to drink constantly your health”

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Drinking rituals and the model of triads in early modern scholarly friendship

Friendship is often perceived as a close interpersonal relationship which can only be maintained in an ongoing mutual gift-giving. But to explain friendship by exchange seems to increase the problems of conceptualising friendship. Is it an instrumental or emotional, a self-interested or altruistic relationship? Is it simply and practicably impossible or just an ideological framework which covers up the interests and structures of power?

I would like to question these issues, as they seem to consider the relationship of friendship and exchange in a binary model: gift and counter-gift, reciprocity and the intentionality of the acts are linked to the perception that two well-defined instances (persons) are at the core of the phenomenon. The picture changes substantially in modeling friendship and exchange in triads. What will be proposed in the paper is a conceptualization of friendship and exchange as a relationship, in which three instances act together in a way, that the problems linked with friendship and exchange seem to be inapplicable. In the same time, the triadic model opens new questions and problems.

As an illustrative example for the triadic structure of friendship relations one could think of the practice of recommendation, or more generally the brokerage in patronage. I would like to explain the triadic model by the drinking rituals among early modern scholars. By drinking a glass together, two friends remember a third common friend who is absent. He is immediately informed about the friendly commemoration and will in turn drink a glass with the bearer of this message in remembrance of the sender. The positions held in the triad are permanently exchanged, so that a large network of friends, a community of commemoration and drinking is established. But who can participate in these rituals? Is it a typically male ritual of friendship? Does it make a difference, if beer, wine, strong alcohol or coffee is the fluid medium of remembrance? And finally, what does it mean to drink together, is it not like the known ritual of the “vin du marché” ending a purchase?

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Moralist concepts of friendship

An interplay of stability and dynamism

In the concepts of friendship, elaborated by French moralists such as Michel de Montaigne, François de La Rochefoucauld and Nicolas de Chamfort, traditional and contemporary perspectives converge. On the one hand, they seek to position themselves within the tradition of philosophical reflection on the concept of friendship by deliberately adopting the fundamental principles of friendship developed, for instance, in antiquity. But on the other hand, as this integration is always undertaken in a practical relation to the moralist's lifeworldly observations, such traditional ideas of friendship are simultaneously modified and reinterpreted within their contemporary social framework.

In other words, the tradition of reflecting on friendship finds itself truly revived through the moralist conceptions of friendship, as inherited elements are reconsidered in new contexts, whereby constants are dynamized. Thus, the notion of friendship itself experiences a peculiar dynamization; it acquires a dynamic quality that may have influenced even recent theories on friendship by such authors as Michel Foucault or Silvia Bovenschen.

The knowledge of friendship in early modern handbooks for secretaries

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Handbooks for secretaries encountered an extraordinary editorial success between 1564 and 1650. Modern scholars have analysed these manuals mainly by looking at the revival of Ciceronian rhetoric they promoted. Little attention has been paid to the political outlook that underpins them. In this paper I shall demonstrate that secretarial handbooks contain important contributions to the theme of “friendship as politics”. As examples I will draw on two important examples: the secretarial handbook by Francesco Sansovino (1564) which launched the genre, and Panfilo Persico’s successful manual (1620) which finally replaced Sansovino’s. The question of friendship as aim and result of good politics is addressed on many levels. The manuals try to propose the secretary as good counsellor and friend of the prince, but they also show the difficulties of applying the ideal of virtuous friendship informed by the rhetorical and ethical heritage of Aristotle and Cicero in the context of modern “reason of state”. The discourse of friendship that pervades the manuals reveals itself as a possibility to address political questions and to propose an alternative to the rise of “absolutist” views on political power. Friendship, I should like to argue, was a way to propose a more egalitarian and republican ideal of politics. The rise of the early modern state, however, took a different direction. The confessionalized and disciplined state relies on a political theory in which the ideal of friendship is replaced by an anthropology of fear. This development can also be traced through the secretarial handbooks. Next to the old models imbued by the politics of friendship, a new “model secretary” is proposed. He is no longer a princely friend but an instrument of state power.

The best conversations are conducted among true friends

Friendship in modern conversation theory

Friendship has been an important topic in European conversation theory since its very beginning, for it is often the social constellation of friendship with its leisure encounters that facilitates (the art of) felicitous conversation. Conversation among friends is appreciated as an especially precious form of social intercourse and communication, and the characteristics of friendship as described in treatises and essays about friendship often relate to communicative concerns. For a long time conversation was a feature of (courtly or bourgeois) sociability, and friendship was regarded as an order of prudence for the challenges of social life. However, in the late 19th century conversation theory is characterized by a withdrawal into the private sphere, which becomes noticeable by the idealization of dialogue between two (Zwiegespräch) as the highest form of conversation. Hence friendship is not only the locus of felicitous conversation. It is rather a necessary condition of conversation, just as conversation “is the practice and consummation of friendship” (Emerson).

This view can be traced through diverse philosophical conceptions of conversation and encounter in the 20th century including dialogical philosophy (Buber), existentialism (Jaspers, Binswanger, Bollnow) and hermeneutics (Gadamer). It is the very idea of friendship that serves as a paragon for the idealization of dialogue. Conditions and characteristics of friendship like “one to one”, mutuality, sobriety, unreservedness and affection are compared or even identified with those of dialogue. On the other hand, this comparison has a reciprocal influence on the idea of friendship by conceiving it as an intimate, ideational and non-material relationship – as opposed to sociability, which is increasingly denounced as superficial. As a consequence the concepts of friendship as well as felicitous conversation frequently become ‘de-socialized’ and even transfigured in a quasi-religious way.

In this presentation I want to compare a set of modern conversation theories (mostly from germanophone writers between 1918 and 1970) with regard to the different concepts of friendship, which are implicit in those theories. Being formulated incidentally and often beyond scientific reflection, the concepts of friendship within the discourse of conversation theory can be regarded as a valuable resource for a historical semantic of friendship. Moreover, I want to discuss possible origins of this close connection of friendship and dialogue. Put more generally, I want to show what scholars of friendship can learn from the history of conversation theory.

Intrigas and Questões

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Blood revenge and social network in Pernambuco, Brazil

This work is about brigas de família (lit. family fights) in the sertão (backlands) of the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, commonly known as blood feuds. By describing how those struggles are lived by its participants and their communities, this work aims to show that if kinship relations are very important in these processes, other kinds of relationships, like friendship and personal loyalty, also play an important and necessary role. Moreover, these struggles should not be considered only as private ones, because political relations are always taken into account in managing the process of those conflicts. It is my purpose not to take the phenomenon in discussion as just an unconscious reproduction of a cultural model, or as a private law residue not yet overcome by the state apparatus. People are actively and morally concerned in each act and its evaluation.

One of the persistent and founding tensions in anthropology, the individual/society opposition, unfolds from different perspectives in methodologies, concepts and theories. Friendship, godparenthood, patronage and clientship have been analyzed by the anthropological literature on “complex societies”, particularly from the 1960s on, as forms of dyadic relations or coalitions centered on individuals. These forms of relations or coalitions are seen as though filling the gaps left by formal institutions in social contexts to which they are thus added. The aim of this paper is to discuss the limits of intelligibility imposed by purely sociocentric or egocentric analyses of vengeance relations I have observed in the sertão of contemporary Pernambuco.

I will first analyze the notion of family in its different local meanings. After that, I will discuss two native categories, intriga and questão, so as to describe the dynamics proper to local hostility relations and its cohesive and divisive effects over the entire social field, beyond those individuals or groups immediately involved. The forms of alignment and opposition in vengeance relations will provide insights into the regulation of municipal political life, also organized in consonance to a family principle. Family, vengeance and politics: for each of these themes a shift in focus will be proposed, one that moves from a systemic, functional and totalizing perspective to a point of view in which one observes the partial and concrete realization of their functioning. This shift will allow us to have a better glimpse of the importance of relations of friendship, patronage and alliances as agents of collectivities, in this case, formulated in terms of family.

Kins and friends

Cases of social networking from urban Kyrgyzstan

Compared to the overwhelming preoccupation with “kinship”, “friendship” so far received relatively little attention in both the discipline of Anthropology as well as in the region of Central Asia.

From a social scientific perspective Central Asia is dominated by studies inquiring into the functioning of the new “democracies” introduced in the 1990s and, related to that, by the question through which patterns the necessary subtle alliances are formed. In this respect most studies identify “the clan” as the primary principle of social integration.

For “friendship” what remains so far in Central Asia is the role of a mere “surrogate” for “kinship”: people seem to turn to neighbors and friends to face everyday difficulties only when a necessary amount of kin isn’t at hand, for example because Soviet social mobility split up their family groups and the current harsh economic conditions add even more to the erosion of kinship ties with reduced exchanges.

Starting from the insight that friendship and kinship are separate, yet interrelated systems of social relations and network analysis is a methodologically unbiased instrument for the investigation of social ties, in this paper I want to present case studies from urban youth networks and their activation in specific situations. The aim for this is to contextualize ties to friends, kin and neighbors from the perspective of everyday practices and perceptions as well as in terms of these friendships’ specific emotional and functional aspects.

The cases, taken from anthropological fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, show for example how a young female very consciously assesses whom to address for help, friends or relatives, when deciding about how best to purchase a new apartment. Another case reveals how initially freely chosen friendship ties over time have become laden with obligations and expectations of loyalty which one actually would rather expect from kinship ties.

Political friendships

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Practices of dealing with inter-personal ties in the political field

Scientific opinions on the role of personal networks in professional politics vary considerably, from corruption to an effective control mechanism. I propose that such interpersonal ties can be seen as “political friendships”, which are fundamental elements of political practices in the everyday life of actors in politics.

In my dissertation I have analyzed the meaning and importance of interpersonal ties for members of the Bundestag. Data have been collected from 21 qualitative interviews with members of the Bundestag and some experts.

The results of my analysis show how members of the Bundestag, as professional politicians, evolve in the course of their political career a specific sense of practice through the perception and analysis of the institutional structure of the field, including its ambivalences and zones of uncertainty. One essential part of this sense of practice is the know-how of using a personal network of more or less stable relationships of acquaintance and recognition, or the conscious building of such a network, for common action in political disputes. I conceptualize the interpersonal ties within such a personal network as “political friendships”. Typical features of these relationships are that they deviate from typical attributes imputed to “friendship”, such as symmetry, dyadic structure, altruism and intimacy, and that they generate a tension between personal expectations and expectations regarding the political role. Professional politicians must evolve practices for dealing with these two levels, which one can understand as a kind of “management” (or art) of balancing personal bonds and political interests. From the particular relation between these two levels of expectations it is possible to differentiate three types of political friendships (private friendship, politics-related friendship and strategic friendship), which I will present in my paper.

Saturday, July 25



Friendship in an age of individualization

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A psychosocial perspective

This paper offers some reflections on a UK-based research project which sought to investigate the practices, experiences and values of intimacy and personal life of people who are particularly individualized. I tell a story of how this project became increasingly psychosocial in orientation, as I grappled with issues of methodology, epistemology and ontology, and sought to reflexively work with and through my own (feminist, queer, and personal) investments in the subject matter. The hunch with which I began the study – that friendship plays an important, and largely unrecognized, role in the lives of people living outside conventional conjugal couple relationships and nuclear families – was born out by the research. But the optimism about this aspect of social change which I felt in the early stages of data analysis, when I was using a more conventional sociological mode of analysis, shifted as I began to undertake in-depth, microscopic, psycho-social-analysis of individual cases, which were suggestive of considerable degrees of ambivalence, psychic conflict and emotional distress amongst many interviewees. Illustrating the paper with a number of short case studies, I seek to develop a psychosocial understanding of friendship in the contemporary world that is attentive both to patterns of socio-historical change, and to the singularity of individual psycho-biographic experience, in its complexity, as well as to the politics of friendship within the shifting landscape of heteronormativity.

Construction of the self through the other

Friends, patrons and clients under female rulers in Late Antique and early Japanese history

This paper will focus on gender related problems of friendship and patronage in Late Antiquity and early Japanese history. Its purpose is to answer the question how relations between equals (friendship) and unequals (patron/client) are structured in a female dominated cultural context and whether they differ from the same type of horizontal and vertical relationships in a male dominated cultural environment.

The time frame of this presentation is the overlapping of Late Antiquity and the period of female rulership in Japanese history. This paper adopts the 3rd through 9th century chronological frame of Late Antiquity. During the same period, we have a number of female rulers attested in Japanese history.

In both female dominated cultural contexts, Japanese or Late Antique, the essential question that has to be answered is how female rulers handle the power by modifying their “former” private “self” through the relations with those surrounding them.

Both societies show a strict, even rigid subordination where personal relations between equals seem just a part of the overall system based on mutual dependence. Members of powerful ruling families are virtually deprived from any privacy or personal choice, and this is particularly emphasized in case of female family members. As rulers they adopt their new social role along with a new “self” and often with a new name, which could hardly be considered as just a ritual or tradition. Withdrawal into a religious “niche” does not grant any privacy either: by such seclusion they simply pass from one kind of subordinated system to another. Moreover, religious devotion requires profound personal change towards a different type of depersonalization.

Where is their “self” then? And is there such at all? The presentation is going to offer some possible answers to these questions. It is divided into two sections. Entitled “Followers and imitators” the first section deals with those cases of female rulership which show obvious similarity with the nature and semantics of friendship and patronage in a male dominated environment. It focuses on two ways of reproducing the “male models”: by following them as well as by imitating them.

The second section entitled “Opponents and dissenters” is devoted to those cases which demonstrate sharp contrast with existing “male models” whether by silently opposing them, or by openly rejecting them.

Fraternal friendship as the missing link between civil society and the nation state

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This paper provides a reappraisal of friendship as a political sentiment underlying national solidarity. Although various studies of nationalism delineate the transformations of face-to-face interactions into ties between 'distant others' they rarely frame the process in terms of friendship. On the contrary, most studies of friendship in modernity tend to underscore its growing detachment from the political sphere, differentiating between friendship as a "pure relationship" nested in liberal ideology and civic ties as a formal alliance lacking emotional content. Both lines of inquiries fail to explain how national sentiments can arouse such strong attachments toward non-familiar others.

I argue from both a conceptual and historical perspective that civic or fraternal friendship is one of the missing links that can serve to explain how values of liberal civil society evolved into the wide-spread political structure of nation-states. First, following theorizing in political philosophy, the Aristotelian paradigm of civic friendship is conceptually applicable to modern civil society based on characteristics such as volition, commitment and sentiment. Second, feminist scholarship has delineated how an implicit discourse of male fraternity underlies the historical realizations of the modern social contract and mediated the notions of both patriotism and nationalism. Finally, networks of male associations and transformations in collective affection from small settings to large-scale societies contributed to the magnification of a politics of friendship. Consequently, rather than viewing fraternal friendship as a relic of traditional societies, it should be studied as a unique aspect of modern nationalism.

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Political patronage in the early modern language of corruption

Intellectual concepts and semantics in action

Until recently many scholars of patronage in early modern Europe have dismissed the concept of 'corruption' as largely foreign to the social ethics and political culture of at least the 16th and 17th centuries. It is now being recognised, however, that the operation of interpersonal ties in the evolving state sphere was frequently accompanied by corruption-related discourses, which, in the long run, undermined the view of clientelism as a publicly legitimate mode of access to office and power. Our paper makes a contribution to this ongoing reassessment, drawing on preliminary observations from a comparative research project on political corruption in England and Germany.

In a first step, based on English lexicons, encyclopaedias and dictionaries, as well as vernacular bible translations, we analyse semantic fields related to practices of donation and (deviant) exertion of influence. Alterations as well as continuities of relevant semantics provide insights into norms, perceptions and interpretations referring to 'corrupt' practices in early modern England. In a second step, these findings are aligned to exemplary writings of English state theory, namely by Thomas More, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume. Here, besides defamatory and negatory conceptions of 'corruption', affirmative or systemic-rational assessments are outlined and classified with regard to corresponding 'schools' of political thought to reconstruct an aperture of the multitude and development of early modern concepts of 'corrupt' practices.

Then the focus shifts to political conflicts in the 16th and 17th centuries revolving around the question of how far patronage relationships were allowed to penetrate the sphere of government. Particular attention will be given to two aspects: (1) the group and power interests that may have encouraged communication about networks and clientelism; (2) the rhetorical and semantic overlaps between such debates and the language of corruption. These problems are illustrated with reference to a territory of the old German Empire, which has attracted a good deal of research in this respect: the Duchy of Württemberg. To set the scene, we show how the evolution of norms linking 'patronage' and 'corruption' can be traced in statutory law. Afterwards, one of the major corruption scandals around 1600 serves to illuminate the political dimension of this process.

In a final step, we will try to link these findings to the patterns of argumentation established on the basis of state theory above.

Who needs friends?

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The role of the master-protégé relationship in two Chinese short stories

Chinese masculinity has traditionally been divided into two contrasting and sometimes conflicting categories: the scholarly cultural man (wen) and the martial physical man (wu). These two stereotypes were also defined by their relationships with men and women. Wu men valued loyalty to their male friends above all, often favouring their brotherhoods over their relationships with their wives or other women. In contrast, while the male literati communities extolled the ideal of friendship, in reality their competition for power and women impeded male bonding.

This paper will be looking at the portrayal of friendship and discipleship for two such wen men as portrayed in two short stories. The stories 'Cat' ([Mao], 1946) by Qian Zhongshu and 'Tiger Cub' ([Huchu], 1932) by Shen Congwen show attempts by men to find fulfilment through their cultivation of male protégés. The protagonists are older, isolated and socially vulnerable men who feel that they have failed in the competitive environment of the urban intelligentsia and so try to boost their social standing by taking an adolescent boy under their wings. Both protagonists attempt to compensate for unsatisfactory relationships with their peers and to justify their threatened masculinity by forming hierarchical master-protégé relationships instead. This relationship is seen as a way to assert themselves and to convince their dismissive contemporaries of their masculinity. However, both attempts fail, highlighting the importance of the protégé in either accepting or rejecting the master's authority. The stories differ in the motivations for finding a protégé, but also in the self-awareness of the protagonist, as while the protagonist of 'Tiger Cub' seems aware of the kind of relationship he wants, the protagonist of 'Cat' initially sees patronage as merely a means to an end.

This paper will focus on the reasons behind taking on a protégé and also the effect of this failure has for the master, emphasising the changing aspect of power and control within this hierarchical relationship. I will also explore how cultivating a young male protégé becomes the only means of validating the masculinity of the protagonist, rather than through heterosexual relationships. The focus is predominantly on the perspective of the master, partly because it is his perspective that dominates the narrative but also because his needs and desires appear more desperate than that of his protégé, another aspect that this paper will look to address.

“Friendship” is an inadequate term to describe the relationship between Stalin and his followers. „Accomplishes“ may be more apt to describe the people around Stalin, since their relations with him resemble instead those of a gang-structure, with a leader who stands undisputedly above all others and demands constant affirmation of loyalty and subordination through rituals of subjugation. Whoever refused to participate in these rituals was destroyed. There were gradations within Stalin’s entourage, but even the person most closely related to him, Molotov, was put to the test heavily on two occasions when Stalin threatened his wife. Others, like Bukharin, were killed, despite their oaths of friendship to Stalin. Close personal relations to Stalin found expression in various forms: common living, frequent private visits, common drinking and meals with the family, common vacations, relationships by marriage, privileges, nicknames and a rough and bawdy insider language.

In the course of the thirties, however, the quality and nature of the network of relations surrounding Stalin underwent changes. In 1930, the most important followers could still feel themselves to be Stalin’s allies. By 1936, they were dependent on him to such an extent that they abandoned fidelity to anyone who fell out of favor with him. High-ranking party members were now affected by repressions which had earlier been applied only at lower levels. In this way the clientele of the individual politburo-members was weakened and decimated. The politburo-members could no longer offer sufficient protection to their clientele and thus lost personal power.

The majority of the politburo-members didn’t resist, but conformed to the new course through displays of fidelity towards the leader. An exception was Ordzhonikidze. A dispute arose between him and Stalin about the repressions in the commissariat of heavy industry. In the end, Stalin drove Ordzhonikidze to suicide. Ordzhonikidze was however not at all willing to fight seriously against Stalin. He had merely tried to change Stalin’s mind. Although Ordzhonikidze belonged to one of the most significant networks among members of the politburo, the latter didn’t support him, thus enabling Stalin to discipline the politburo. In 1937/38, several politburo-members were arrested and shot.

Stalin’s actions show the extent of the mistrust he felt towards those in his immediate circle. Despite all the demonstrations of absolute devotion and servility, he mistrusted many officials. This was especially true of the elder Bolsheviks, who had accompanied his ascent and supported his rivals within the party of the twenties. Stalin regarded them as potentially dangerous people and strove to replace them with younger men, who owed him their ascent and seemed more dependent on him.

The problem of friendship in the borderlands of Christian Brazil and beyond

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This paper proposes studying the ‘problem of friendship’ as means to revitalise comparative friendship research. Studying how friendship is perennially problematised and thus informs social ethics, drawing on Foucault, elucidates the cultural subtleties that many studies elide. Contemporary human sciences have eschewed friendship, partially due to its ‘universality’. This contrasts with kinship, which has long-fascinated scholars with its variations. Current scholars do note that in practice, friendship rarely reflects its ‘Western conceptual ideal’: a private, emotional, ‘secular,’ loyal relationship between human equals. Yet, despite calls to interrogate this model, scholars still use it as a point of comparative departure, which can ultimately conceal conceptual specificities, even in contexts where ‘friendship’ is an indigenous category.

The arguments above emerge from ethnographic research in Brazil among poor urban migrants to the Southeastern Amazonian colonisation frontier. Although a cultural borderland, it comprises that loose formation of the ‘West’. Nevertheless, for my interlocutors friendship is a problem and often deemed impossible. Only by delving into their problematisations and ethics of ‘friendliness’ was it revealed that their friendship ideal was not primarily secular or individual. My interlocutors consider God to be the primary (sometimes only) friend, who constantly “mediates” friendships between humans. Migrants also enact friendliness and shift alliances in part to tame the devil’s immanence in humans, who ultimately lack individual agency. This shifting supernatural agency makes humans inconstant, and friendship impossible. Finally, these problematisations/ethics shape broader processes—like a politicised land occupation. An approach that engages the idea of ‘friendship’ as secular and individual could easily miss this supernatural, yet unstable, source of friendship, and its political implications. Ultimately, studying the ‘problem of friendship’ can facilitate challenging broader assumptions, as has this ethnography—which sheds new light on how human friendship can continue to be a theoretical and practical problem within Christianity.

Social-anthropological perspectives on friendship in Africa

In the first part of my paper, I will explore patterns, logics, and consequences of friendship relations in various African contexts.

Approaches to friendship often accentuate either emotional or functional aspects in an unbalanced manner. I argue that friendship should be seen as a bundle of features, which may differ with respect to a particular social situation as well as the cultural context. Recent empirical data from Africa suggest that the local perspectives, notions and idioms comprise functional and emotional dimensions as the central elements or founding layers of friendship relations, without necessarily separating these or putting them in hierarchical order.

To illustrate my approach, I will, in the second part of my paper, present a case study on friendship relations among male artisanal gold miners in Northern Benin (West Africa). In the context of gold mining camps, strategies of economic as well as social risk minimization incline many migrants to prefer and sustain friendship bonds even across ethnic identities. One reason, among others, is that parity in income sharing is more likely to be established among friends than among kinsmen. Furthermore, friendship relations, growing from comradeship, may help young migrants to cope with precarious conditions in the mining camps. Friendship is often specifically pertinent to integrate people of very different regional, ethnic and social origins.

Generally, the African material points to the necessity to work out more flexible definitions of friendship without losing its conceptual accurateness. Narrow definitions of friendship often overstate its voluntary elements. It is, however, often inappropriate to draw a too sharp line either between friendship and kinship or between friendship and clientelism. There are overlapping features, passages and shifts as well as a degree of simultaneity in these relations. Furthermore, friendship ties may reinforce existing kinship relations – and vice versa. Diverging from the relevant local emic categories, the analytical content of a relationship may shift in favour of ‘friendship’. This, however, reveals a methodological problem, a dilemma between emic perceptions or idioms and our analytical categories. I argue that we could, however, empirically describe a relationship as “friendship” even though local actors refer to other, dominant terms, such as brothers etc., on the basis of some pertinent criteria such as a high degree of intimacy, trust, an attitude of sharing, intensive exchange relations and a sense of equity and (both emotional and material) support.

Finally, I will try to indicate pathways of future research.

“Quand je retournai, je trouvai toutes les cabales de la cour changées”

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Friendship under the conditions of 17th-century court society

Early modern court society has traditionally been seen by historians and poets alike as a place where hypocrisy, mistrust, intrigue and treason were common. One would thus expect that there could hardly be such a thing as friendship in this society. However, in their letters and memoirs, French courtiers talk surprisingly often about friendship, “amitié”, and about friends, “amis”. This apparent paradox can be solved if we historicize the concept of friendship itself, acknowledging that the “friendship” the courtiers are talking about is different from what we are accustomed to mean by this term. To address the problem of early modern courtly friendship, I focus on the French court of the 17th century as an example. Not only was this one of the largest courts of the early modern age, it was also widely imitated by smaller courts throughout Europe. Moreover, it has traditionally been the most prominent, even paradigmatic, example historians have used in order to analyze early modern courts. What shows up in letters and memoirs from the court is an openly politicized, often very unstable form of friendship, which has little to do with sentimental conceptions of friendship which became prominent in modern times. To understand courtly friendship, we need to explore the court as an institution or organization. As politics pervaded every aspect in the courtiers’ life, we need to look at court politics to understand the form of friendship that developed in this small world, where a great deal of the power elite was living cheek-by-jowl, creating a face-to-face society of the powerful. How were alliances formed and broken? How did courtly alliances differ from traditional feudal bonds and from provincial patron-client-relationships? Moreover, we need to take a look at the nobility, the milieu the courtiers came from. Which norms and values shaped this group? Which were the virtues that a nobleman was expected to possess? By taking into account the aforementioned context, we can take a new and closer look at friendship as an aspect of everyday life at court.

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The Manchu-Mongol intermarriage in the Qing Dynasty

The Qing dynasty placed a great deal of importance on intermarriage with the Mongol nobilities on the northern frontier of the Chinese Empire. This strategy secured the political boundaries of the frontier and cemented the loyalty of the Mongol elite to the dynasty. This was a fundamental concern of the Qing because the Mongols had been a constant menace to the previous Ming dynasty. The intermarriage policy of the Qing dynasty was not a throwback to the Han or T'ang dynasties, but was an institutionalized policy of permanent marriage alliances between daughters of the imperial line and male Mongol nobles, and, to a lesser extent, daughters of Mongolian nobles with Qing imperial princes and bureaucrats. The long-term goal of securing the northern frontier and cementing the bonds between the Mongols and Manchus is an outstanding example of the uses of friendship and patronage in East Asian history; a policy that has not yet found its historian.







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