The Politics of Transnational Accountability Policies and the (Re)construction of Corruption
The Case of Tunisia, Transparency International and the World Bank

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The Construction and Reconstruction of Corruption: The case of Tunisia and the World Bank

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Abstract

Corruption is a global systemic problem causing detrimental effects to both social and economic progress. Predominant research typically offers solutions that are based on the assumption that corruption is a problem originating in, and endemic to developing countries, an assumption that disregards corruption's production within a global system of economic power relationships and international regulatory institutions dominated by Western countries and multinational corporations. The anti-corruption discourses and accounting measures initiated by both international and local actors in their fight against corruption have not frequently been critically investigated in developing country contexts, especially not in the Arab region, despite the widely observed links between authoritarianism, corruption, and political upheaval. This study illustrates the struggle over the nature of corruption and the measures taken by multiple stakeholders to combat it in Tunisia, before and after the Jasmine Revolution of 2011. By using ethnographic material and critical discourse analysis, the study shows how Western global actors such as the World Bank and associated nongovernmental institutions such as Transparency International, account for and discursively (re)construct corruption in ways that defend and reconstitute postcolonial relationships of domination embedded within the neoliberal global order. The study contributes to existing literature by providing a conceptual framework that indicates the highly fungible character and the different emergent cycles of corruption. Based on its findings, the study offers novel research avenues that promote reflexive theoretical and methodological steps that aim to enrich anti-corruption scholarship and practice.

The Construction and Reconstruction of Corruption: The case of Tunisia and the World Bank

Corruption is a global phenomenon (Kaikati et al., 2000; Milton-Smith, 2002; Pacini et al., 2002). It is regarded as "one of the great evils of our time" (Hough, 2013) and the "single greatest obstacle to economic and social development" especially in developing world contexts where weak or non-existent barriers facilitate the direct selling and buying of political influence (Word Bank, 2011). Global anti-corruption measures such as those promoted by international non-governmental actors such as Transparency International (TI) and the World Bank (WB) represent an important foundation for the campaign against corruption which is upheld in predominant research and practice (see Wilhelm, 2002; O'Leary, 2006; TI, 2013). Studies typically indicate that corruption operates on complex and intricate networks and thus it is important to explore the ways political and institutional structures shape what is defined as corruption (Nielsen, 2003; Neu, 2013). Predominant research often concludes that global anti-corruption indices (such as TI's corruption perception index) provide a useful tool to deal with corruption and to attain a higher moral and ethical ground (Lindgreen, 2004; Wilhelm, 2002; Hough, 2013; Cuvero-Cazzura, 2014).

Despite – and partly because of - its global application, the definition of corruption is equivocal. In predominant research corruption is sometimes defined ex negativo, as the opposite of transparency (Florini, 2007), or involving everything from private-to-public, from 'bribery' to, simply, 'ingenuous acts' (Argandona, 2003, p. 257). Studies often conclude that corruption is "the illegitimate selling of government authority for private gain" (Bukovansky, 2006, p. 181; Thomas & Meagher, 2004, p. 2). Institutional actors such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) define corruption in similar ways such as "the active or passive misuse of the powers of public officials (appointed or elected) for private financial or other benefits". Nonetheless, definitions are still ambiguous and broad, for instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) defines corruption as "the abuse of authority or trust for private benefit" (Schiller, 2000) and the WB defines it as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (World Bank, 2011). The Council of Europe specifically indicates the equivocality surrounding corruption, stating that "no precise definition can be found which applies to all forms, types and degrees of corruption or which would be acceptable universally" (Council of Europe, GMC 9695).

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The elusive conceptualizations of corruption have paradoxical consequences as they permit the development of Procrustean and politically infused accounting of corruption through measures such as the Corruption Perception Index developed by Transparency International and widely used by institutions such as the World Bank (Everett et al., 2007, Murphy, 2011). Critical studies argue that global indices of corruption are biased in representing the perceptions of specific actors with their own subject positions and economic interests rather than any objective measure of corruption, categorize developing countries as the origin of corruption whereas copious evidence suggests otherwise (Whyte, ed., 2015), are often used to enforce economic management conformity and political agendas based on dominant interests within a global neoliberal order, disregarding the economic, social, ethical, and cultural interests and beliefs of the regulated subjects (see Everett et al., 2006). Subsequently, the struggles and negotiations of local actors in their fight against corruption especially in developing countries where Western actors impose their own logics and agendas are underexplored. The objective of this study is to provide a richer understanding of the discursive techniques employed by international actors in the construction and reconstruction of corruption in the context of Tunisia, the outcomes of which can be described as a form of "epistemic violence" (Foucault, 1980) particularly consonant in the postcolonial context (Spivak, 1988). The case is important because it is revelatory and representative (Yin, 1994) of the implications of Western discourses of corruption in non-Western societies.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, we integrate different streams of research on corruption and challenge taken-for-granted definitions by providing a critical analysis of the standard typologies of corruption in predominant literature, which are also represented by the WB and TI. Secondly, our findings are important as they extend beyond indicating that TI's notion of corruption acts to underpin the neoliberal extension of business-friendly market capitalism throughout the world (see Hindess, 2005). Through an analysis of the local conceptualizations of corruption and the anti-corruption measures proposed by Tunisian representatives vis-à-vis the WB and TI ones, we provide a novel perspective. Our conceptual framework shows the different emergent cycles of corruption discourse and its highly fungible character amenable to incorporation within a hegemonic narrative justifying particular predetermined policy tropes. Specifically, we indicate that corruption can be (re)constructed as: I. Corruption as an accepted taboo; II. Corruption as malady; III. Corruption as vexing problem IV. Corruption as unravelled by neo-liberal solutions. (see Figure 1)
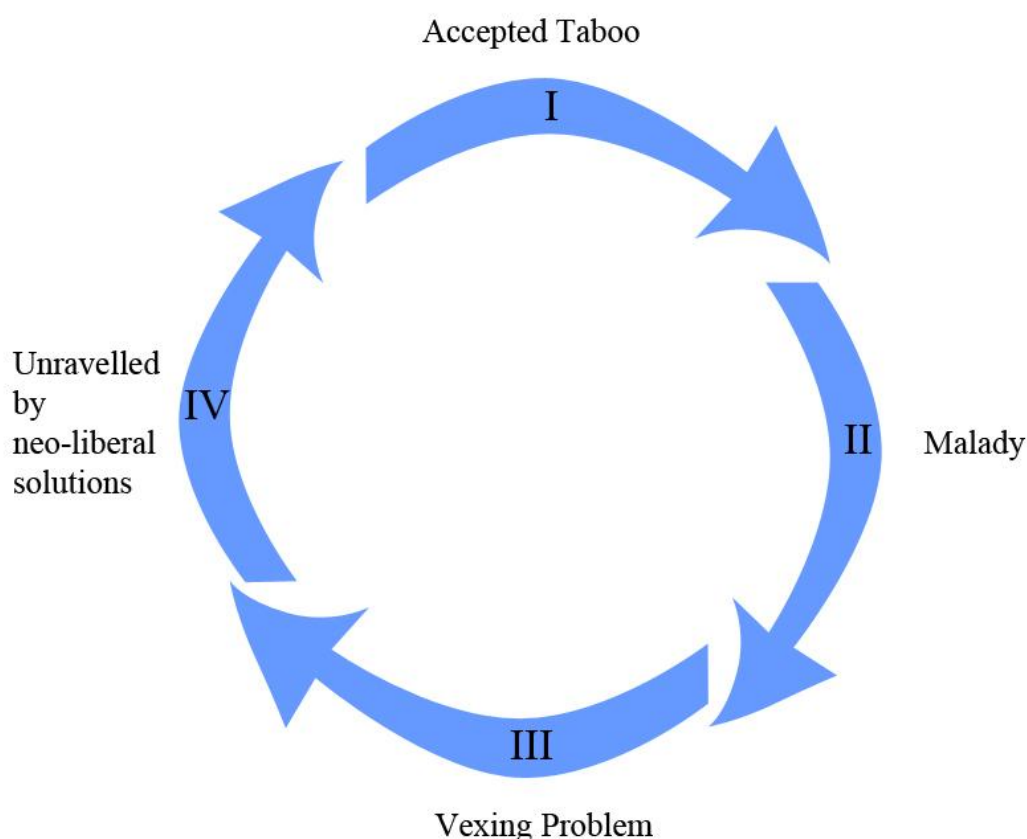
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Figure 1. Corruption (Re)construction Cycles:
The Case of Tunisia and the World Bank

The paper begins by exploring the extant literature and highlights certain limitations in anti-corruption research when discussing corruption solutions across developed and developing countries. We then indicate that instead of echoing the corruption indices of Western actors such as WB, TI or OECD and their proposed measures to combat it, a more reflexive option is to regard corruption as a diverse set of phenomena subject to divergent explanations and remedies that are highly contingent on the subject positions of the interpreters of corruption. Further, corruption is intertwined with historical factors including in Tunisia the emergence of a post-colonial state marked at its birth by the alienation and violence of the colonial experience (Mamdani, 1996; Fanon, 1968). We argue that existing anti-corruption policies are based on deontic universals of justice and free markets that reinforce unequal North-South power relationships, and depoliticize politics by foreclosing alternative economic and social imaginaries. We then introduce the empirical analysis of the evolution of corruption discourse in Tunisia–as promoted by TI and the World Bank–before

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and after the Tunisian revolution of 2011. Through a discourse analysis of the corruption repertoires of the actors involved (i.e., the World Bank, TI, local NGOs as well as elected politicians) we illustrate the paradoxes and unintended consequences of the discourse and politics of anti-corruption. Lastly, we conclude that anti-corruption policies should be developed and implemented through an open acknowledgement of the global psychologies of both the developers and the regulated subjects. We propose new research avenues for anti-corruption for avoiding the paradoxes bred by categorical imperatives of justice and neoliberal economic ideals.

Defining Corruption

Corruption is often seen as undermining good governance, engendering extra costs to businesses that engage in bribery, and imposing lost opportunities on those that don't (Caiden et al., 2001). Corruption definitions are typically vague. For instance, corruption is variously defined as "a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects, as it takes on various forms and functions in different contexts" (Andvig & Fjeldstad, 2001, p. 7) and as "the deliberate intent of subordinating common interest to personal interest" (Napal, 2006, p.6). In attempting to provide a more detailed explanation and identify the different forms of corruption, studies explore the different levels of unethical conduct, e.g., nepotism, bribery, and extortion (see Atlas, 1999). Other studies, Tanzi (1998) classify corruption in terms of its modus operandi such as bureaucratic/petty corruption and political/grand corruption. In Tanzi's (1998) view, 'petty' corruption is correlated with resource scarcity where low or non-existent salaries and wages often motivate people to engage in small scale corruption. At the opposite end is 'systemic' corruption that describes a situation where major institutions and processes of the state are dominated and used by corrupt people. From a pragmatic perspective, international institutions adopt a similar standpoint and develop anti-corruption policies that target mainly the latter, systemic, category of corruption which is defined as the misuse or "abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (World Bank, 1997; TI, 2013a). In short, despite a limited anthropological stream of research that acknowledges that corruption is a fungible concept whose definition and character is inextricably interwoven with culture and social practices (see Chabal & Daloz, 1999; Treisman, 2000), there is a tendency in predominant research to conceptualize corruption from a specifically Western liberal economic standpoint. Studies define corruption as a universal, standardized global problem with well-defined sub-categories and no qualitative variances (see Otáhal, 2013). As a result, anti-corruption measures built on such corruption models often postulate a one-size-

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fits-all solution disregarding both the local-historical conditions where it applies, and the ethical dispositions and world views of those working in designing anti-corruption policies.

In anti-corruption practice, corruption is treated in a way that mirrors the approach of predominant research. For instance, Transparency International (TI) argues that "a preliminary understanding of corruption involves dispelling the myth of corruption as a matter of culture" (Ryan, 2000, p. 333). TI assumes that such an understanding of corruption can be achieved by integrating the public input of civil society regarding corruption through the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). However, the CPI is a cross-national comparison of perceptions of corruption that, although being a consolidation of the perceptions of informants selected by TI, is regularly described and presented as an objective reflection of the prevalence of corruption in a society. In this regard, the CPI as an index based upon perceptions of corruption is necessarily reflective of the subject positions (and interests) of the perceivers that are never clearly stated, and in all likelihood not consciously articulated (Fromm, 2013). For example, TI's official message is that "civil society [is] key to anti-corruption success in Middle East and North Africa" (TI, 2013b). The rationale behind international organizations such as TI or the World Bank involving civil society in anti-corruption programmes is based on the idea that "civil society knows the causes and consequences of corruption better than do distant and elite experts, so civil society needs to be enlisted in any attempt to eradicate corruption" (Everett et al., 2006, p.6). Nonetheless, in a twist of irony, the process of including civil society's input and developing anti-corruption standards driven by institutions that militate for transparency is often opaque and vests various interests. An emerging stream of critical research has highlighted that the ethical dispositions of those working in the anti-corruption field are complex, contradictory, and situational (e.g., Hindess, 2005; Everett et al., 2006). Notably, we do not argue that these reasons are grounded in conspiratorial motivations. Rather, as we will explore next, we underline that the different frameworks of corruption are dependent on the fact that the actors involved have different ways of seeing what corruption is. Such multiplicity is rooted in the actors' different "idiomatic, epistemological, ontological, and moral correspondences" (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 179) that affect how the problem of corruption is understood and subsequently how should it be solved.

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Contextualizing Corruption

The rationale of anti-corruption measures often resides within a predominant neo-liberal ideology where any deviation from market allocation norms are perceived as inherently prone to corruption and where marketization and competition is regarded as a panacea for dealing with corruption, thus privileging state privatization (see Khanal, 2000; Klitgaard, 1994; Schloss, 1998). Privatization of government assets and minimization of regulation are seen to ''unambiguously reduce opportunities for corruption'' (Gray & Kaufmann, 1998, p. 29). Competition is regarded as ''a form of discipline'' that an organization needs to ''force it to face up to the costs of corruption'' (Larmour & Grabosky, 2001, p. 183). Under the banner of efficiency, utility maximization and economic growth, international organizations such as the World Bank or TI militate for implementing anti-corruption measures. However, such policies are designed in a rationale that unconsciously occludes and circumvents the differing historical, economic, and social circumstances that are faced by governments and citizens of the post-colonial South. In short, the global prescriptions of international organizations such as TI or the World Bank take for granted the universal applicability of diagnosis, causality, consequences and prescriptions that are particular to specific environments and ideological subject positions (see Everett et al., 2006) and which will differential outcomes and beneficiaries dependent on the local socio-political environments in which they are applied.

We argue that corruption has to be conceptualized as intertwined with historical and social factors and grounded in the situated political and economic problems it sprang from. To this extent, standardized definitions of corruption are inadequate as their meaning depends on the context in which anti-corruption measures are being engaged. For instance, in our case, Tunisia, the socio-political context is marked by a variety of specific features including: the construction of the postcolonial state on the institutional and psychological foundations of a colonial regime that denied the inherent equality and citizenship of the colonial subject; a surviving post-independence national economic model built upon a relatively successful combination of strategic industrial protection, limited opening to foreign capital, and the fostering of a large middle class; the recent overthrow of a pro-Western kleptocratic autocracy and the persistence of economic relationships between international capital and Tunisian economic operators developed in obscurity during the former regime; and, divergent popular views on whether the state should be built on secular or religiously-infused ethical foundations. Studies note that unless efforts are made to develop socially specific and

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culturally consonant anti-corruption policies, the implementation and enforcement of these policies will prove to be elusive (Husted, 2002). In the Tunisian case, we argue, the universalized World Bank / TI approach to corruption risks simply transferring corruption from state to market relationships, promoting rapid liberalization that could increase inequality and undermine the stability of Tunisian society, as well as effectively institutionalizing power networks developed during the dictatorship. In sum, we argue that there is a need to deconstruct standardized definitions and ahistorical indices of corruption – and consequent anti-corruption policies - to ground them in specific contexts, meeting the needs of the specific society and its citizens rather than the imperatives of a global anti-corruption discourse and the international institutions with which that discourse is associated.

The practices of ranking and labelling countries as 'corrupt' using standardized metrics can frequently have a paradoxical effect, which has been the case in Tunisia, where corruption perceptions have worsened since the democratic revolution, almost certainly because information is more freely available and in addition organizations such as civil society can now express themselves freely. This paradoxically negative effective of expanded social freedoms in terms of corruption perception indices has a directly harmful effect on economic prospects for a country such as Tunisia through risking loss of needed investment, resulting in a cycle that can contribute to higher rates of corruption in unfavourably rated countries (Warren & Laufer, 2009).

Contextualizing Anti-Corruption Measures Based on Deontic Ideals of Justice and Free Markets

Anti-corruption policies and standards are generally based on the implicit assumption that free markets and competition essentially promote the right to pursue private goods and that this pursuit leads to an ongoing achievement of collective good and justice.

The appeal to universal claims is inescapable within any social change discourse. Revolutionary movements in particular are built on universalized narratives constructed in particular circumstances. The Tunisian 'Jasmine Revolution' of 2011, for example, appealed to universals of 'freedom' and 'justice' including both human rights and economic opportunities that were perceived as being blocked by the ruling Ben Ali clan; categorical imperatives of justice that offer revolutionary movements the possibility 'to act on and through the common' (Arendt, 1958).

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In the post-revolutionary context after the Ben Ali clan fled the country on January 14 2011, anti-corruption discourse was adopted by various political parties in the run-up to the October 23 2011 elections for a National Constituent Assembly. Commitment to anti-corruption differentiated the newly free political parties from the former ruling regime and reflected their determination to deliver social and economic justice.

The nascent anti-corruption discourse in Tunisia coincided with rapidly shifting positioning of the World Bank and other financial institutions in Tunisia. In line with the *Accepted Taboo* phase in Figure 1, above, until the Revolution these institutions had been almost entirely laudatory of the former regime which was portrayed as delivering high rates of economic growth and a business-friendly environment, even though Wikimedia-leaked US embassy tapes revealed that the international diplomatic community in Tunisia was aware that the population was becoming increasingly resentful of the ruling clan's vaunted corruption;.

Shortly after January 14 2011, the World Bank recast itself on the side of the revolution, and particularly emphasized the institution's commitment to fighting the corruption that has undermined the previous regime's legitimacy; this is reflected in the *Malady* phase of Figure 1. However the apparent concordance between the new position of the World Bank and newly free local political actors obscured important differences. Whereas the newly free Tunisian political forces proposed an ideological or moral viewpoint on corruption (for example the leftist Popular Front characterized corruption as reflecting the inherent nature of capitalism, while the main Islamist party Ennahda criticised corruption based on Islamic teachings on honesty and against corrupt behaviour), international institutions promoted anti-corruption policies based on the universal merits of the neoliberal free market that they argue will introduce competitive transparency into previously opaque transactions dominated by the kleptocratic Ben Ali state.

The example of anti-corruption highlights that the mobilising force of universal or meta-narratives, whether of revolution, justice, free markets, or anti-corruption, is coupled with indeterminacy and the exercise of power through the construction of discursive hegemony. From a post-structuralist standpoint, meta-narratives are always contingent, historically located and situation-specific, created or captured by group(s) of people that assume to speak on behalf of the claims of all other groups. Hence, the absolute applicability of a single claim entails denying the historical uniqueness and contingency of this claim;

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people do not "grasp the ethnocentric horn of the dilemma and they privilege their own group" (Rorty, 1991, p.29). Applied to the Tunisian context, the World Bank and Transparency International anti-corruption meta-narrative is encapsulated in a standardized international corruption measure that measures corruption from the perspective of barriers to the smooth operation of free markets, the *Vexing Problem* of Figure 1 is defined through this optic. This results in corruption measurements and anti-corruption policies that privilege some actors over others or indeed harm the interests of national economic development where this does not coincide with neoliberal marketization and integration into global markets; the final phase of the cycle charted in Figure 1. Thus a danger of proclaiming universal ideals of justice through a standardized anti-corruption approach is that such an approach can, "in some circumstances, give rise to the active annihilation of voices that do not fit into apparently universal schemes" (Fleming & Spicer, 2003, p. 175).

Critics often militate against universalizing ideals and deem a universal 'empty', something unmaintainable given that particular localized struggles against corruption can never completely fit into an universal narrative of justice as "no agent can speak directly for the *totality*" (Laclau, 2000, p.58 italics in original). However, we do not promote an either/or dichotomy between deontic or normative and nihilistic empty ideals of justice and free markets as the cornerstone of anti-corruption policies. Rather, we argue that a common point should be pursued which allows all the voices involved in anti-corruption measures to be heard. Differently put, we do not assume that justice is to be achieved through standardized global policies (e.g., TI's CPI index and the World Bank's privatization and marketization imperatives) or conceive that localized anti-corruption struggles inherently fail as they lead only to fragmentation and an empty justice ideal. Instead, we see the "common struggle" as a way of reaching towards a contextualized anti-corruption policy. A common fight against corruption would be characterized by recognizing the socio-cultural and historical differences of all the actors involved. For instance, the 'common struggle', as Hardt and Negri (2004) noted, is a multitude of actors or fractions that coalesce in collective actions: "A multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p.100). In other words, the common fight against corruption should go beyond the application of 'global' norms or cultural relativism and should rather be "based on communication among singularities and emerge through the collaborative social process of production" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 204).

In short, the deontic universals of justice and neo-liberals ideals underpinning anti-corruption policies can pose the risk of oppression to those outside of the Northern or Occidental socio-cultural context, depoliticize politics and amplify uncertainty. A shift in perspective is needed in the conceptualization of corruption and measures to combat it. Specifically, we note that the need to step away from a position where decontextualized universals of justice, rights and freedoms (that are typically neo-liberal economic rights) are applied to the observation of behaviour in a particular historical and social venue, assigning it with the label of 'corruption' and applying a remedy that is universally applicable. We argue for a new position which pays attention to the very sites, problems and bodies where corruption happens. Specifically, in defining corruption one should inquire the logic by which the actors and events come together and cohere. This specific way through which such nexus coheres becomes the concept of corruption. Such a shift in perspective has the potential to create a site where actors can engage productively in a 'common struggle' for defining corruption and developing anti-corruption measures based on an open politicized debate where contestation is available to all. For exemplifying how the corruption nexus unfolds in daily life we now turn to our case. The next section starts by a concise description of our methods and is followed by the analysis of how global and local actors approach corruption in Tunisia.

Methodology

Data Analysis

This paper is based on a critical discourse analysis (CDA), a method commonly used to critically assess the discursive positions and involvement of institutions. CDA has been employed by researchers from a variety of different critical epistemological and ontological viewpoints (van Dijk, 1977; Fairclough 1992; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). Van Dijk (1998) emphasizes the socio-cognitive interactions between discursive and social structures. Fairclough (2006) has specifically engaged CDA in order to explore the role of the World Bank in shaping a particular neoliberal model of globalization. This method allows us to identify the World Bank and TI's discursive manoeuvres that create an orientalising discourse regarding developing countries that justifies their classification as defective and requiring 'treatment'. CDA is relevant as it allows us to explore and undermine the taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the definition of corruption and thus highlight the existing tensions in

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the global programmes designed to combat corruption. Notably, by using this method we do not attempt to simply map out the different discursive positions on corruption for identifying the epistemological framework of whether the analysed material depicts *true* or *false* reality representations. Instead, we analyze the discursive fragments as social representations of corruption and highlight the diverging elements and interests of particular actors from the community, and specifically from international business elites.

Investigating corruption as a socially constituted moral category resting upon a popular conception of what is socially just, is important as corruption can present a useful label for defining social norms and sanctions for deviance from those norms. We believe that one important role of scholarly research in the social sciences is to further a deepened understanding of social meaning of corruption. However, achieving this objective requires the deconstruction of the existing corruption discourse as promoted by international institutions which can be seen to legitimize and normalize a particular international hierarchical social and economic order that has been found wanting, particularly in the context of the global economic crisis that began in 2007 and continues in much of the world, and which has had a particularly marked impact on Tunisia and other countries on both sides of the Mediterranean region.

The data set which was subjected to a critical discourse analysis is comprised of the following: a) 470 pages from corporate reports of the World Bank and TI concerning corruption in Tunisia and corruption indexing methodologies of TI, b) 215 press reports from the Tunisian French language press between 2011 and 2015 relating to corruption c) Interviews with twelve actors involved in anti-corruption activities in Tunisia during 2014 and 2015[1]. Our analysis involved identifying discursive markers concerning: the way corruption was defined by various actors in relation to source, temporal dimensions (i.e., prior and subsequent the revolution), and assessment mechanisms. We repeatedly compared and contrasted the discursive positions for identifying recurring points of reference in the data such as repetitive actions or discursive acts that inform a phenomenological description of corruption (Tracy, 2013). In doing so, we clustered all the recursive reference points into two emerging themes which indicate the discursive ways in which corruption is socially constituted in our case: the World Bank and TI's discursive position on corruption and the

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[1] Including three members of the Tunisian parliament from three different political parties, three civil society leaders engaged in anti-corruption projects or campaigns, a senior parliamentary adviser on anti-corruption, two Tunisian academics and three international scholars of corruption and economic reforms in Tunisia.

Tunisian actors' discursive frameworks of corruption. Subsequently, our analysis is presented next under the two main themes. The first theme indicates that the World Bank and TI's discourse on corruption is grounded in a neoliberal political agenda, i.e., as a factor impeding the development of foreign businesses. The second theme shows that corruption on the Tunisian political scene is viewed differently by different Tunisian actors. The Islamist political bloc represented by the Ennahda (Renaissance) party defines it from a moral perspective, i.e., an unethical economic and social process connected to divergence from Islamic moral principles in governance, whereas the political left considers it discursively constituted as a socio-economic factor, i.e., capitalism. A significant proportion of the Tunisian elite shares a neoliberal orientation with the World Bank and TI, and supports a neoliberal privatization programme. Although this perspective is supported overtly by only some smaller political parties such as Afek Tounes, these views are widely held within the 'non-political' government of 'experts' that was appointed by parliament in February 2014 to organize elections and address security and economic concerns[2].

We briefly present the case in the next section.

The Case: World Bank, TI, and the Tunisian Revolution of 2011

International organizations are one of the important avenues through which the morality and ethics of international business is promoted (see also Kaikati et al., 2000). Thus it is important to analyze the discursive positions of TI and its related actors such as the World Bank as these organizations' dispositions toward corruption are relevant not only because these organizations are active in the global fight against corruption, but also because they are key actors in the shaping of the global governance field (Held & McGrew, 2002).

The Tunisian Revolution of January 14 2011 was of historic significance for a number of reasons. It occurred after a relatively long period of stagnation or even regression in the spread of democratic transitions worldwide. It overturned many presumptions regarding the impossibility of a democratic revolution occurring within the Arab region. In particular, the revolution challenged the common assumption that Muslim-majority societies were unsuitable for democracy and that some kind of benign dictatorship is the best arrangement for the governance of these societies. In the period before the Revolution, Tunisia's authoritarian government under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali closely fit this

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[2] Many of the members of the government have worked internationally for much of their careers, including several who returned to Tunisia specifically because they had been named to the government.

preconceived model of Arab development, even though the state enjoying friendly relations with both Western powers and international financial institutions. The close and mutually supportive relationship between the Tunisian pre-revolutionary authoritarian government and the international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is reflected in several publications (World Bank Country Brief, 2010). Notably, in 2010, only a few months before the revolution, the World Bank produced a report about the economic achievements of the Ben Ali government, which emphasized the high quality of the government's economic policies and social outcomes such as the reduction of corruption. The report states: "Tunisia has made remarkable progress on equitable growth, fighting poverty and achieving good social indicators. […] In [the World Bank Institute's] World Governance Indicators, *Tunisia is far ahead in terms of government effectiveness, rule of law, control of corruption and regulatory quality*"[3].

TI is an independent international NGO but is historically closely tied to the World Bank both in terms of its origins and fundamental approach and viewpoint. The former World Bank executive Peter Eigen established TI and the creation of TI effectively reflected the externalisation of a World Bank internal political debate around the idea and impact of corruption. Prior to the creation of TI, there was a relatively strong pole of opinion within the World Bank and the broader community of (neo)liberal economists that argued that actually corruption could be beneficial in societies under some circumstances, for example in fostering a break-up of monopolies (Leff, 1964; Huntington, 1968). For instance, a number of studies argued that corruption enhances economic development since it makes it easier to entry into a market due to the need for efficiency (Cheung, 1996). However, another strand of thinking within the World Bank, of which Eigen was part, argued that corruption was actually a major brake on growth in developing countries (e.g., Khanal, 2000; Klitgaard, 1994). Eigen left the World Bank to found TI, and with the success of TI and declining support for the corruption=efficiency argument, the discourse of the Bank on corruption has converged with that of TI. From a critical perspective, this convergence coincides with a broad common project to reconstruct non-Western societies in the image of the Western (corporate) interests that dominate both the World Bank and TI: "Where the World Bank uses the problem of poverty to legitimate its good governance initiatives, TI uses the problem of corruption as a stalking horse for a major programme of societal reform" (Hindess, 2005, p. 1391)

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[3] World Bank Country Brief, Tunisia, April 2010, available at
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTTUNISIA/Resources/Tunisia_CB_EN_final.pdf on May 20 2013.

Similar to the World Bank, Transparency International appears to have considered pre-revolutionary, authoritarian Tunisia as a generally positive example of a successfully developing country[4]. In terms of corruption perception, in 2009, the country was ranked 65th out of 180 countries, ahead of numerous European countries including three European Union member states: Greece, Romania and Bulgaria (Hope, 2009). In 2010, on the eve of the revolution, the country's TI Corruption Perceptions Index score improved further to 59th, drawing level with two further EU countries, Slovakia and Latvia (Guardian, 2010). Both in 2009 and 2010 Tunisia ranked far ahead of any other state in the North African region in terms of corruption perceptions although even these high rankings were substantially below TI's rating of the country as 39th least corrupt country in the world in 2004[5]. Hence, it might therefore have seemed a surprise to TI and the World Bank that in late 2010 demonstrations began to break out across Tunisia, initially sparked by the self-immolation of a young fruit and vegetable vendor in an impoverished inland town who apparently felt that he had been treated corruptly and abusively by a government official (Thorne, 2011).

Nonetheless, at least segments of the international community were well aware that Tunisians had long been subject to a repressive and notably kleptocratic regime in which leading members of the government, and particularly those associated with the family of President Ben Ali, routinely used their positions to capture both private and public markets and enrich themselves. The level of diplomatic community awareness of the corruption problems in Tunisia was exposed by the release of the infamous 'Wikileaks' US embassy tapes in December 2010, coincidentally at the same time as the first manifestations of what was to become the Tunisian revolution were beginning to take hold (Guardian, 2010). The cables to Washington of then US ambassador to Tunisia Robert Godec are testimony to his visceral disdain for the behaviour of the Tunisian ruling clique, and his thorough awareness of the potential connection between the regime's corruption and systemic collapse. On July 17 2009, Ambassador Godec in a valedictory briefing for his successor noted that:

> [C]orruption in the inner circle is growing. Even average Tunisians are now keenly aware of it, and the chorus of complaints is rising. Tunisians intensely dislike, even hate, First Lady Leila Trabelsi and her family. In private, regime opponents mock her; even those close to the government express dismay at her reported behavior.

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[4] In World Bank parlance it is categorized as an "upper middle income country" with approximately similar per capita GDP as some of the recent accession states of the EU)

[5] http://www.babnet.net/rttdetail-11486.asp accessed on

> Meanwhile, anger is growing at Tunisia's high unemployment and regional
> inequities. As a consequence, the risks to the regime's long term stability are
> increasing. (Godec, 2009)

Wikileaks-published details of the exotically decadent behaviour of the ruling family became instant hits in the ferment that Tunisian social media became as the revolutionary movement deepened. Some of the passages that were translated to the Arabic and French languages used in the country, and gleefully shared, include:

> [T]here are ancient artifacts everywhere [in his house]: Roman columns, frescoes
> and even a lion's head from which water pours into the pool. El Materi [President
> Ben Ali's nephew] insisted the pieces are real.

> Belhassen Trabelsi's holdings are extensive and include an airline, several hotels,
> one of Tunisia's two private radio stations, car assembly plants, Ford distribution, a
> real estate development company, and the list goes on …Yet, Belhassen is only one
> of Leila's ten known siblings, each with their own children. Among this large
> extended family, Leila's brother Moncef and nephew Imed are also particularly
> important economic actors.

Subsequent to the revolution, both the World Bank and Transparency International shifted their discursive position on corruption in Tunisia. For example on July 12 2012 the World Bank's Tunisia country home page was headed "We're Here!" and went on to state that, "In January 2011, Tunisian citizens demanded voice and accountability. The Bank is supporting Tunisia's transition with focus on jobs, economic recovery and inclusion". Thus while previously having rated Tunisia as a positive example of an "upper middle income country", now the World Bank reversed their discursive stance arguing that they strongly identified with the revolution and underlined the World Bank's commitment to support democratic inclusivity[6].

In its public positions the World Bank has not acknowledged that it had been wrong in its earlier analysis or that it would re-evaluate the policy processes that resulted in such a deeply erroneous analysis of the circumstances within Tunisia. The absence of self-critique is a striking feature of international governance organization, where Western dominated institutions routinely rate and rank the quality of governance in developing countries in a

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[6] http://www.arnehoel.com/index.php#mi=1&pt=0&pi=10&s=0&p=0&a=0&at=0.

process that defines the latter as an inadequate Other in need of help. This authority is assiduously cultivated. Wilks (2002) and Pablo (2007) detail the lengths to which the World Bank has gone in order to establish itself as the unchallenged authority in terms of knowledge production regarding international economic development, specifically branding itself as the *Knowledge Bank*. This assertion of superior knowledge required classifying economic development successes as the result of following international financial institution recommendations, whereas failures were the result of deviating from advice: "While the IFIs took credit for the macroeconomic successes of Egypt and Tunisia up to 2008, they admitted no responsibility for the negative socio-economic features of neoliberal transformation or the corrosive political features of these autocracies" Pfeifer (2015).

In a similar shifting position to the World Bank, a few weeks after the Tunisian revolution, TI issued a press release stating that "Transparency International (TI), the global anti-corruption organisation, strongly supports the people in Egypt and Tunisia working to build new democracies based on transparency, integrity and accountability, free from corruption"[7]. In April 2011, TI's regional director for Africa and the Middle East stated: "Tunisia's post-revolution spring has brought joy and genuine empowerment to the Tunisian people, but as the extent of corruption and abuse of power is revealed, a sense of bitterness and bewilderment at how a system *could fail so utterly*, is emerging in the Tunisian society"[8]. In June 2011, TI France launched a lawsuit seeking to support the new Tunisian government's efforts to freeze Ben Ali family assets in France[9]. However, in acknowledging their support for the change of regime and efforts to recoup the ill-gotten assets of the Ben Ali – Trabelsi clan, TI did not express any similar bewilderment as to how its own corruption perception system equally '*could fail so utterly*' [authors' emphases].

Transparency International's Discursive Position on Corruption

In this section we analyse how TI's use of a very specific set of data in describing a specific phenomenon is used to confer judgment about the quality of a society as a whole.

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[7] Transparency International (2011), "Building strong, accountable and transparent institutions is key to a successful transition for Egypt and Tunisia", press release, February 14, accessed at http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/20110214_strong_institutions_egypt_tunisia.
[8] Chantal Umiwana, "Transparency International in Tunisia", April 8, http://blog.transparency.org/2011/04/08/transparency-international-in-tunisia/.
[9] Transparency International (2011), « Biens mal acquis de la famille Ben Ali : SHERPA et TI France deposent une plainte avec constitution de partie civile », June 9, accessed at http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/20110609_biens_mal_acquis_ben_ali.

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Focusing first on its brief "Overview" of the 2012 Corruption Perception Index[10], TI provides a description of the actual methodology, data content, and meaning of the findings. However, TI discursive stance implies the generalizability of the data to a broad assessment of a national culture, or as a "relation of equivalence" (Fairclough, 2006, p.59). The Overview states that the CPI gathers the opinions of "analysts, businesspeople and experts" about "how corrupt their public sectors are seen to be" (Overview CPI, 2012). However, it also states – without any foundation or explanation – that, "[b]ehind these numbers is the daily reality for people living in these countries" (Overview CPI, 2012). It goes on to make the apparent admission that it "cannot capture the individual frustration of this reality", but this passage is followed with "but it does capture the informed views of analysts, businesspeople and experts in countries around the world" (Overview CPI, 2012). The adverbial conjuction 'but' is used as a rhetorical device for influencing the reader into assuming that while it does not *directly* capture corruption in a society, its methodology provides a reasonable proxy or approximation of corruption in that society.

However, logically, there is no justification to think that the opinion of "analysts, businesspeople and experts" about "how corrupt their public sectors are seen to be" reflects in any generalizable way how citizens experience the totality of corruption. This is indeed acknowledged by TI: "it [the CPI] is not a verdict on the levels of corruption of entire nations or societies, or of their policies, or the activities of their private sector"[11]. However, illustrating the elusiveness of TI's definitions, in the same FAQ, TI claims (without any justificatory argument) that: "Capturing perceptions of corruption of those in a position to offer assessments of public sector corruption is the most reliable method of comparing relative corruption levels across countries" (Overview, 2012).

The rhetorical devices employed by TI can be seen as vehicles of generalization whereby using a very specific set of data related largely to the ease of doing business, one extrapolates to the extent to which a society suffers from corruption. Furthermore, TI's use of

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[10] http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview accessed on 25 May 2013. The content of the Overview page being analysed here is as follows: "First launched in 1995, the Corruption Perceptions Index has been widely credited with putting the issue of corruption on the international policy agenda."
"What does a number mean to you? Each year we score countries on how corrupt their public sectors are seen to be. Our Corruption Perceptions Index sends a powerful message and governments have been forced to take notice and act."
"Behind these numbers is the daily reality for people living in these countries. The index cannot capture the individual frustration of this reality, but it does capture the informed views of analysts, businesspeople and experts in countries around the world. How does your country score?"
[11] http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/in_detail/ accessed on May 25 2013.

numbers is itself an articulation of governance power over the subjects in question (Hansen & Muhlen-Schulte, 2012). By successfully describing this highly fungible and contestable phenomenon of 'corruption' through ranked numbers, TI becomes an authority exercising soft power both directly through the assertion of a country's obligation to address its 'problem' and indirectly through the sharing of rankings with other accumulative rankings indices. Indeed, TI helpfully assists the reader towards a multi-faceted numerical judgment of a society through providing on its individual country ranking page a series of other organizations' rankings[12]. However, several of the other organizations' rankings scores are themselves included in the calculation of TI's CPI, demonstrating statistical multicollinearity[13]; i.e., the various measures tend to be looking at similar factors and are thus of limited independent usefulness (although presented as if mutually reinforcing each other's validity).

TI's political independence has been widely questioned by various critical scholars (see Hindess, 2005; Bukovansky, 2006). The object of scrutiny is typically the organization's engagement of what it describes as an "independent review of updated CPI methodology" by the European Commission Joint Research Centre at the Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen (Saisana & Saltelli, 2012). Saisana and Saltelli (2012), interestingly, make no effort to assess the quality and suitability of the data being collected or the significance ascribed by TI to its findings, and focus exclusively upon the statistical approach that TI adopted, assessing it to be legitimate. Conversely, an assessment of all the main corruption indices, including the CPI meta-index and its constituent indices, specifically cautioned regarding the misrepresentation inherent in generalising extending expert and business assessments of corruption to represent experiences of ordinary citizens (Ko & Samajdar, 2010: 518):

> Therefore, we can hardly say that ICIs[14] represent the general public's perception of corruption. Instead, they rely mostly on the perceptions of experts, and to some extent businessmen. It would be interesting to reflect on what exactly is the nature of experts who dominate the samples of most corruption indexes.

As we noted earlier, the CPI is itself a composite ranking comprised of a number of different ratings of perceptions of corruption for individual countries by what TI describes invariably

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[12] For Tunisia, for example, see http://www.transparency.org/country#TUN accessed on May 25 2013.
[13] Correlation of two or more variables in a statistical model.
[14] International corruption indices.

as "analysts, businesspeople and experts" and "business people and country experts" (Overview CPI, 2012). The different indices used in the ratings vary from country to country and can be as few as three and as many as 10. In the case of Tunisia, results from 7 different indices are combined in order to achieve the CPI ranking for 2012 (Overview CPI, 2012). These are: a) the African Development Bank Governance (AFDB) ratings; b) the Bertelsmann Foundation Transformation Index (BTI); c) the Political Risk Services Country Risk Guide (PRSCRG); d) the World Economic Forum Executive Opinion Survey (WEF); e) the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (RLI); f) the Economist Intelligence Unit Country Risk Guide (EIU); and g) the Global Insight Country Risk (GICR) ratings.

An exploration of these rankings and their application for Tunisia results in some surprising findings. The first ranking, the African Development Bank, was based solely on results from 2011 containing a ranking from 1 to 5 for transparency, accountability and corruption in public sector (AFDB, 2013). However, the ranking of Tunisia is absent from the table for 2011, so it is difficult to see where TI's AFDB data originates, and for what year[15]. The second ranking, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index included only information gathered before the first free elections and thus did not take into account the very important change to the country's governance which increased transparency and would presumably have a positive effect on public sector corruption performance. As a result, Tunisia's BTI score was used in the 2012 TI rankings as if they reflected the country's situation after the 2011 democratic revolution whereas at least in part they reflected the situation *prior*. In this case TI's discursive position did not include any statements of clarification concerning the erroneous nature of its data on the corruption evaluation in Tunisia.

The third measure, the Political Risk Services Country Risk Guide, is not publicly accessible therefore it was not possible to assess its legitimacy. The inability to test the data validity of TI's rankings creates a non-transparent data presentation which also found in the fourth index, the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Executive Opinion Survey, which is available only to WEF members and thus could not be accessed. However, the results of the survey are the basis of the WEF Global Competitiveness Report (GCR). Surprisingly, the Report for 2012-2013 (which bases its findings on the 2011 survey) notes "the World Economic Forum decided not to use the data collected in Tunisia this year because of a

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[15] AFDB Governance Ratings 2011, accessed at http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/2011%20Detailed%20GR-FOR%20DISCLOSURE___-1-SS.xls on 26 May 2013.

structural break in the data making comparisons with past years impossible" (Schwab, 2013, p. 70). Thus, TI's discursive position on corruption is based on incomparable 2011 data from WEF (which should not be used for year-on-year comparison) or it is based on 2010 data which would reflect the situation before the revolution of January 2011 and would similarly not be helpful in reflecting the post-revolution situation.

The fifth index, the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (RLI)[16] is a project of the American Bar Association (ABA), and largely funded by Bill Neukom, long-time chief counsel of Microsoft and former President of the ABA[17]. The RLI attempts to construct an overall picture of the rule of law in 97 countries, based on a complex and clearly articulated methodology that involves 9 main indicators of which corruption is one, measured through 48 subindicators. Unlike many of the component indicators of the CPI, the RLI has made a serious effort to involve public input, with a survey of 1000 citizens carried out in each of the 97 survey countries, including Tunisia, weighted at 50% of the overall indicator ranking with the other 50% derived from expert rankings (Botero & Ponce, 2010). However, the corruption indicator that is drawn by TI for use in the CPI index focuses only on a narrow definition of corruption as government officials using public office for private gain[18]. Tunisia scores relatively higher in the RLI index than in several of the other CPI components (39th of 97 countries).

The sixth index is the Economist Intelligence Unit's country risk analysis (EIU). Details concerning the EIU analysis are inaccessible to the public and it is as well unclear from TI's brief methodological notes[19] exactly how the EIU data are used. However, EIU's discursive stance indicates its political and economic predilections. In a corporate report on Tunisia, EIU calls for wide-ranging neoliberal economic reforms including measures to make it easier to fire workers, loosening of investment laws, privatisation, more public-private partnerships, privatisation of state banks, and strengthening property rights and intellectual property enforcement (EIU 2013[20]). Lastly, the seventh CPI indicator is drawn from Global

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[16] http://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/WJP_Index_Report_2012.pdf.
[17] https://www.law.stanford.edu/campus/academic_building/about-william-h-neukom.
[18] The five questions asked on corruption are: Government officials in the executive branch do not use public office for private gain, Government officials in the judicial branch do not use public office for private gain, Government officials in the police and the military do not use public office for private gain, and Government officials in the legislative branch do not use public office for private gain.
[19] Corruption Perceptions Index 2012: Technical Methodology Note, accessed at http://www.transparency.org/files/content/pressrelease/2012_CPITechnicalMethodologyNote_EMBARGO_EN.pdf on May 26 2013.
[20] EIU (2013), "The business environment in post-revolution Tunisia", April 22.

Insight[21] Country Risk Ratings, where it is derived from 'expert staff assessment' of [the] 'likelihood of encountering corrupt officials'[22].The data are inaccessible and the methodologies used in the analysis were not possible to be evaluated.

In conclusion, the discursive position of TI's CPI is indicative of several methodological issues. Of the seven indicators used by TI for evaluating corruption in Tunisia, three were inaccessible and thus no methodological information was available; which can be seen as a substantial issue of non-transparency in the data analysis. Three indicators (AFDB, BLI, and WEF) were using data from before the installation of a democratically elected government after the 2011 revolution. Such analysis can be seen however inappropriate in examining the corruption status quo under a completely different, democratic polity. Moreover, all the indicators acknowledged year-by-year incomparable data. Only one (the American Bar Association) had comprehensive methodological explanation and a substantial inclusion of public input. All of the data sources focused only on the corruption of public officials, which TI itself acknowledges is only part of the picture of corruption. The analysis is concentrated only towards corruption as it would be experienced by business people or analysts assessing the country for a business audience, with only 50% of the ranking of one of the seven data sources (in other words 7% of overall rating) considering the experience of ordinary citizens. In short, the discursive stance underlying TI's CPI ranking in the case of Tunisia, while grounded in an ambiguous and somewhat obscure methodology, clearly offers an assessment of corruption as experienced by businesses and particularly foreign businesses.

Nevertheless, as a result of changes in methodology, TI has noted that 2012 CPI rankings should not be compared with those of previous years[23]. However, TI rankings are routinely compared in the media both from year to year and across countries, a practice that TI has not discursively engaged with. In Tunisia's case, the indication of the country's decline from 59th place in the world to 79th in CPI rankings between 2010 and 2014 was reported widely each year[24]. In response, political actors such as the president of Tunisia

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[21] Now HIS.

[22] http://www.insead.edu/library/E_resources/documents/Six-Factor_Country_Risk_Ratings_Methodology.pdf.

[23] "2011 CPI scores are not comparable with CPI 2012 scores", *Corruption Perceptions Index 2012: Technical Methodology Note*.
[24] For example, "Indice de Perception de la Corruption 2012 : la Tunisie recule de deux places », *Business News*, 5 December 2012, http://www.businessnews.com.tn/Indice-de-Perception-de-la-Corruption-2012--la-

Moncef Marzouki remarked on the apparently deteriorating situation (Masrour, 2012). TI's discursive repertoire did not however engage with such developments in the light of its contrasting discursive positions such as: a) the rankings included in the CPI are based on ambiguous elements; b) parts of the 2012 data specific to the CPI are from prior to the January 2011 revolution; c) the data claim only to measure only 'perception' almost exclusively from the point of view of business people (and mainly foreign business) regarding corruption; d) the data concern only corruption of public officials and do not address corruption within the private sector; and f) statements that 2010, 2011 and 2012 CPI data cannot be compared.

In the next section we indicate how corruption in Tunisia has been discursively constituted by the World Bank and employed as a policy vehicle.

Recapturing the initiative: The World Bank, Corruption, and Neoliberal Reform

As noted above, the World Bank had lauded the Ben Ali regime for its economic and governance achievements, including, in retrospect remarkably, its progress in the fight against corruption. After the revolution, the Bank archived its earlier pronouncements on Ben Ali and declared itself with the people in the fight for democratic accountability and against corruption.

The Bank's discursive manoeuvre was underpinned and extended by a notable research-based knowledge-shaping agenda. In March 2014 the Bank published *All in the Family* (Rijkers et al. 2014), what was for the Bank an unusually hard-hitting and explicit report on corruption under the Ben Ali regime. The report claimed on the basis of extensive research that the Ben Ali clan had managed to capture 21% of all private sector profit in the country through a series of manipulations of business and investment laws. The key to Ben Ali's corrupt self-enrichment, according to the Bank, was the excessively regulated Tunisian economy which allowed state-sponsored rent-seeking. The solution for the country's new rulers should be further deregulation, marketization, privatization, and reduction of investment and trade barriers.

Tunisie-recule-de-deux-places,520,34941,3; « Tunisie : la République des bakchich », *Jeune Afrique*, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2728p042.xml0/.

The Bank assiduously marketed its report, including an op-ed piece in the Washington Post[25], restatement of the argument as a chapter in the neoconservative American think-tank the Heritage Foundation's *2015 Index of Economic Freedom*[26], blogs on the World Bank website, and extensive review articles in major international[27] and leading Tunisian publications[28]. The communication of the arguments based on the report consistently follows the same logical flow: a) securing the interest of the reader and enlisting their identification with the authors' viewpoint through highlighting examples of the egregiously corrupt conspicuous consumption of the Ben Ali clan, b) arguing that the root causes of the corrupt system lay in the clan's manipulation of an overly regulated and state-dominated economy, c) warning that the situation post-revolution has not fundamentally changed, and drawing on TIs declining Corruption Perception Index to suggest the situation is even getting worse: " Tunisians see corruption to have increased since the revolution"[29], and d) the only solution to corruption is neoliberal reform.

The Bank's corruption exposé thus led into detailed proposals and advocacy for neoliberal reforms in Tunisia. In another major report issued later in 2014, two of the three authors of the corruption report published *The Unfinished Revolution: Bringing Opportunity, Good Jobs And Greater Wealth To All Tunisians* (World Bank, 2014), a 330 page report calling for a comprehensive set of neoliberal reforms. The report called for a particularly comprehensive menu of the usual international financial institution neoliberal reforms, including: removal of subsidies on foodstuffs, fuel and other necessities; private-public partnerships across the economy including education; reduced employment protections; opening the Tunisian economy to greater foreign ownership; reducing corporate and individual taxation; "bonfire of regulations"; regional wage-setting and more 'flexibility' in collective agreements; focus on agricultural exports to Europe rather than production for local use; unilateral goods and services sectors to foreign competition; increasing prices of basic

[25] Bob Rijkers, Caroline Freund and Antonio Nucifora, "Tunisia's golden age of crony capitalism", *Washington Post*, March 27, 2014, accessed at http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/27/tunisias-golden-age-of-crony-capitalism/.

[26] Antonio Nucifora, Erik Churchill, and Bob Rijkers (2015), "Cronyism, Corruption, and the Arab Spring: The Case of Tunisia" *2015 Index of Economic Freedom*, Washington, Heritage Foundation, accessed at http://www.heritage.org/index/book/chapter-4.

[27] Borzou Daragahi, "Former Tunisia president changed business rules to family's benefit", *Financial* Times, March 24, 2014. Fahmi Ben Abdelkader et Daniel Labaronne, « La Tunisie piégée par le capitalisme clanique », *Le Monde*, April 17 2014, accessed at http://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2014/04/17/la-tunisie-piegee-par-le-capitalisme-clanique_4402853_1466522.html.

[28] Vanessa Szakal «State Capture in Tunisia» : A World Bank Report on Economic Corruption Economy ›, *Nawaat*, April 3, 2014, accessed at http://nawaat.org/portail/2014/04/03/state-capture-in-tunisia-a-world-bank-report-on-economic-corruption/.l

[29] Bob Rijkers, Caroline Freund and Antonio Nucifora, "Tunisia's golden age of crony capitalism", op cit.

utilities such as water' and, removal of regional development incentives, etc. (World Bank, 2014: 317 – 329). The global integration aspects of the proposed reforms are further detailed in yet another major 2014 World Bank report on Tunisia, *Advancing Tunisia's Global Integration.*

According to one reading, the plethora of policy recommendations of the World Bank to Tunisia after the 2011 revolution merely reflect the organization's mandate to support economic development and specifically what the institution calls "pro-poor growth". Given the rupture with the former regime, a policy opening was present, and an institution like the World Bank would legitimately consider this to be an opportune time to offer its expertise.

Another reading, however, would question the discursive manoeuvres whereby the Bank occluded its fulsome support for Ben Ali – even for his anti-corruption policies - through a highly promoted report on the regime's corrupt practices that failed to acknowledge the Bank's earlier complicity[30], which contains a 'Trojan Horse' argument that the corrupt policies were actually the result of state-led development policies (and not the more obvious and simple explanation that an unaccountable dictator abused his power). Indeed, the disingenuousness of the Bank's position did draw criticism from observers within Tunisia:

> In the guise of some sort of awareness campaign focused on economic corruption associated with the Ben Ali clan, the World Bank carries forward its own unwavering dependency-creating, self-serving objectives. In Tunisia's case, (re-)reforming the Investment Law represents the organization's pathway to fulfilling these objectives. The Investment Law of December 1993 [contradicts] the extreme liberalism advocated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, particularly the Law's third article which restricts foreign participation in many sectors including services and agriculture. (Bellamine, 2014)

Bellamine goes on to argue that neoliberal reforms are "the hidden agenda of the recent report and, on a larger scale, of the World Bank's over-arching plans for the Tunisian economy". Anti-corruption activists interviewed for this article were equally under no illusion that the Bank's anti-corruption discourse underpinned a broader neoliberal economic

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[30] The closest the Bank gets to such an acknowledgement is a sophistical statement by its Tunisia chief economist Antonio Nucifora that admits the Bank's critiques were "often masked in bureaucratic language" ("At the World Bank, we clearly were not immune to getting behind the image the Ben Ali regime tried to create for itself. And while we regularly detailed the regulatory failures, the barriers to entry, and the privileges of the old system, this was often masked in bureaucratic language that did not get to the heart of what was clearly a system asphyxiated by its own corruption", response to commentary submitted to article *All in the Family*, reproduced at http://nawaat.org/portail/2014/04/03/state-capture-in-tunisia-a-world-bank-report-on-economic-corruption/)

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agenda, "it is clear that the neoliberal agenda is being pinned on to World Bank support to anti-corruption activities. Our objective is to work with them on anti-corruption without necessarily adopting all their other economic agendas" (Interview with TB, Tunis, 8 October 2014).

The Bank's argument that the ills facing its economy are caused by excessive state engagement runs contrary to the perspectives of many international economists expert in the region, whose contributions are ignored and unreferenced in the relevant World Bank studies that generally fail to acknowledge the existence of divergent economic explanations and policy recommendations. Harrigan and Said (2010), in a comparative study of the impact of World Bank and IMF programmes in several Arab region countries, argue that Tunisia's outlier positive performance in the decade 1996 – 2004 was specifically because the country did not follow international financial institution prescriptions:

> Tunisia can be characterized as a strong developmental state with characteristics similar to the developmental states of East Asia … development often took the form of state-led development in contrast to the IMF and World Bank model of market liberalization. (Harrigan and Said, 2010: 18)

Cammett (2007) likewise argues that Tunisia's state-led economic development, launched under the regime of independence leader Habib Bourguiba and continued under Ben Ali albeit with growing distortions due to corruption, facilitated the country's rapid economic development, allowing it to achieve levels of GDP growth and positive human development indicators: "State-dominated political economies may be more amenable to implementing macroeconomic and infrastructure-related measures, which are critical in the initial stages of upgrading." (Cammett, 2007: 1889). The worsening of corruption in Tunisia coincided with the implementation of privatisation and other structural adjustment measures mandated by the World Bank and IMF, which provided opportunities for the Ben Ali clan to capture newly created markets (interview with TC, veteran feminist activist, Tunis, March 22 2015).

Similarly ignored within the Bank's propositions regarding corruption are the perspectives of heterodox Tunisian economists, particularly associated with the Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie (OTE)[31] and the Campaign to Audit Tunisia's Debt (ACET)[32], who argue along similar lines to the Syriza government in Greece that much of the debt that

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[31] https://debateconomietunisie.wordpress.com/.
[32] Chafik Ben Rouine, 17 July 2013, "How the IMF and global finance are trying to block a democratic examination of Tunisia's debt", Jubilee Debt Campaign, accessed at http://jubileedebt.org.uk/blog/imf-block-democratic-tunisia-debt.

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encumbers the Tunisian economy and limits infrastructural and social investment is 'odious'; entered into by the former dictatorship and misused. OTE and ACET argue for an audit of debt engaged by Tunisia under Ben Ali, much borrowed from the World Bank, with illegally drawn loans being written off. The leftist economist Rafael Correa, president of Ecuador, embarked on such an audit when he came to power in 2007, resulting in 7 billion dollars being recouped that was invested into social and environmental programmes.[33]

The discourse of corruption in Tunisia as shaped by the international organizations Transparency International and the World Bank has evolved according to organizational interests in retaining expert authority in an emergent situation where a) the respective organizations were faced with a risk of being held accountable for having whitewashed the previous regime, and, b) the possibility of transfer of financial and moral responsibility for the losses of corruption from the global South to the global North in the midst of a global legitimacy crisis of the capitalist system (with unpredictable popular movements underway in several other countries within the European periphery).

In the concluding section we will explore the implications of the case study within the broader context of the construction of the meaning of corruption within a global economic and moral order infused with power inequality, conflicting interests and beliefs, and the persistent risk of systemic instability.

Tunisian Political Actors' Discursive Position on Corruption

In Tunisia corruption is politically contested and subject to the divergence of different social and economic groups in terms of their corruption concerns. Tunisia is on the edge of Europe and the Middle East – North Africa regions and its population is divided in philosophic–political orientation between supporters of a largely secular and rationalist-modernist approach that accepts the hegemony of the dominant neoliberal world order, those who base their world view on an 'Arab-Muslim' identity, Islamic faith and a religious morality-based foundation, and those who are critical of both capitalism and what they see as obscurantism. The divergences in perspectives results in particularly sharp political dividing

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[33] Isabelle Mandraud, « La Tunisie refuse les dettes héritées de la dictature », *Le Monde*, 17 July 2012, accessed at http://www.lemonde.fr/tunisie/article/2012/07/17/la-tunisie-refuse-les-dettes-heritees-de-la-dictature_1734672_1466522.html#LbFObX7SHhYIjhla.99.

lines, although evidently there is a continuum of viewpoints both within the political classes and the population as a whole.

The issue of corruption has a contested political nature in post-revolutionary Tunisia. The discourses of anti-corruption and revolution were so closely tied together during the revolutionary uprising of late 2010 and early 2011 that all political actors were required to demonstrate their faithfulness to the revolution through an emphasis on anti-corruption. Practically speaking, the question of what the state should do to define unlawful corruption in the pre-revolutionary era and who should be punished and how, along with the campaign to repatriate ill-gotten gains from overseas, are all political questions where parties tend to try to outdo each other (ref needed). At the same time, some post-revolutionary political forces have roots in the old regime, and therefore there is political advantage to opposing parties in accusing the former's leaders of corrupt complicity in the Ben Ali regime[34].

Given the existing discursive struggle inherent to corruption in Tunis, we argue that corruption is highly fungible; dependent on the different idiomatic, epistemological and ethical dispositions of the actors' involved and grounded in situated social interactions. In our case, such multiplicity leads to two different discursive positions of corruption: a) corruption as a political-economic issue rooted in capitalism b) corruption as a process that fundamentally disrupts moral and ethical economy.

First, for the Tunisian political left, effectively, capitalism *is* corruption[35]. Corruption is seen as a meta-narrative actually able to hide the essentially corrupt nature of the entire system "The symbolic effect of corruption, however, displaces public resentment from the 'collusive' political-economic system on to the misdeeds of individual 'wrongdoers'. Ritual sacrifice of the latter is required to purge public anger, thus allowing normal practice to continue" (Girling, 1997, p.viii).

Second, mainstream political discourse, especially in the neoliberal era, strongly reflected in the views of Tunisian European-oriented business elites, argues that corruption represents a brake on economic growth, by disrupting the free operation of markets and

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[34] Among hundreds if not thousands of articles in which accusations of corruption are hurled around, see for example, see Imed Bahri (2011), "Tunisie : Farhat Rajhi règle ses comptes avec Béji Caïd Essebsi et Kamel Eltaief", 16 December, accessed at http://www.kapitalis.com/politique/13407-tunisie-farhat-rajhi-regle-ses-comptes-avec-beji-caid-essebsi-et-kamel-eltaief.html.

[35] See for example the founding document of the main Tunisian leftist coalition, the Popular Front, "Projet de Charte politique du Front populaire" (October 2 2012), http://alencontre.org/moyenorient/tunisie/tunisie-creation-dun-front-populaire-projet-de-charte-politique.html.

providing undesirable locations for the deviant realisation of value (Mauro, 1995). Corruption is defined from within a framework of capitalist political economy, in other words represented by behaviour that is unlawful. Corruption also may undermine the view that 'there is no alternative to market capitalism' (Glynn, Kobrin and Naim, 1997: 9). The abuse of state power is viewed as a particular threat to free market capitalism and thus mainstream anti-corruption focus is on public sector corruption. The fight against state corruption was cited as a key priority by Prime Minister Mehdi Jomâa during his speech requesting the confidence of the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly of his new 'technocratic' government in January 2014[36].

Third, the Islamist political discourse, which was previously severely repressed in Tunisia, quickly became an important feature of the post-revolutionary scene. A major characteristic of Islamist political discourse including that of the Ennahda movement is a focus on the moral economy. In contrast to the political left, most Islamists are not opposed to capitalism per se but argue that any economic system must treat participants with dignity, and should be built upon the principle of social justice and of mutual obligation between government and population. Studies argue that Arab uprisings against authoritarian rule have centred on the belief that "the ruler has transgressed his obligations" (Sadiki, 2009, p. 215). Writing about uprisings prior to the Arab Spring, which Sadiki argues entailed an organic process of learning on the part of Arab populations, he notes that "In all cases these uprisings amounted to protests against social inequality, corruption, nepotism, authoritarianism, and regime incompetence" (Sadiki, 2009, p. 215). In contrast both to the leftist and mainstream understandings of corruption, which are based on the view that there is such a thing as corruption that can be positively defined, Islamist discourse concerns itself primarily with the relational nature of corruption, which would represent the abuse of authority.

This somewhat different standpoint towards corruption that reflects a moral failing rather than necessarily or only illicit financial transactions has been reflected in the debates of the Tunisian elected parliament. For example, the Ennahda parliamentarian Yamina Zoghlami, who chaired the Martyrs and Wounded of the Revolution and General Amnesty Commission at the National Constituent Assembly has consistently argued that the definition of corruption should be expanded to include those who were guilty of repressing Islamists

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[36] « Le gouvernement Jomâa obtient la confiance de l'ANC », *Business News*, January 29 2014, http://www.businessnews.com.tn/officiel--le-gouvernement-jomaa-obtient-la-confiance-de-lanc-video,520,43887,3.

and others during the dictatorship[37], an interpretation that substantially overflows the narrow definition of corruption provided by TI. Ennahda members raised a similar point at a meeting of the commission for the fight against corruption on May 15 2013, calling for the expansion of the definition of corruption to include non-financial crimes. In a debate on the justice sector on February 1 2013, Zohra Smida, another Ennahda member, similarly described corruption in the justice sector in a manner that clearly described the subjugation of the judiciary to the executive as corruption, per se[38].

It can be seen that the conceptual frameworks with which different Tunisian actors understand corruption overflow the definitions and interpretations of the globally dominant institutions that assert expert authority on the subject; Transparency International and the World Bank. The Tunisian revolution of 2011 was a moment during which the taken-for-granted authority of dominant discourse dissolved, resulting in both a power and conceptual governance void that was particularly striking in the case of corruption, the nodal point around which divergent critics of the regime could at least temporarily make common cause. This article has explored the ways in which the two institutions have sought to regain their authority and assure that the boundaries of the discussion do not continue to overflow the conceptual limits of a global hegemonic order.

Conclusion

The article has explored the politics of anti-corruption in Tunisia following the 2011 democratic revolution. It has traced the discursive challenges encountered by the main global organizations that define corruption (Transparency International) and frame appropriate policy frameworks to address corruption (The World Bank) according to that definition. It has been argued that both organizations engineered neat discursive manoeuvres enabling them to convert a disadvantage of complicity with the previous regime into the reassertion of the dominant tropes upon which these organizations' global authority over anti-corruption thinking are grounded: 1) corruption is a problem centred in the global South, 2) corruption is the product of an overbearing state, 3) corruption can only be cleansed by exposure to the forces of the global market.

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[37] For example, debate at the Commission on General Legislation, April 24 2013.
[38] http://www.marsad.tn/fr/chroniques/51545ecab197de386e2a87e1.

We have argued that this definition of the corruption that led to the downfall of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia both misstates the origins of that corruption and proposes a treatment that is actually a continuation of the causes of the proliferation of corruption in the Ben Ali era; the opportunity for private appropriate of public goods in the context of neoliberal reforms; a phenomenon that has been noted in numerous locations since the advent of neoliberalism (Wedel, 2001).

The article's empirical findings are situated, however, within a broader context of power imbalance within the global economy. The global neoliberal order is based upon the ability to permeate borders so that market relationships – heavily structured in favour of the global North, and specifically a transnational financialized elite (Murphy and Willmott, 2015). The case of corruption discourse in Tunisia is a reflection of the hierarchized relationships and epistemic authority that are required in order to assure the continuing functioning of the existing order. While organizations such as the World Bank are 'agnostic' towards democratic orders (Levy, 2010), and as has been seen in this example are ready to express fulsome support for the 'will of the people', the limits of the freedom of decision within a neoliberal order are quickly reached when fundamental questions are asked of what Marcuse (1955) described as "comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom", based upon "the regulation of free competition among unequally equipped economic subjects; the curtailment of prerogatives and national sovereignties which impede the international organization of resources", a description that remains presciently apposite 60 years after its publication.

Corruption is a concept, and its combat a practice, that conforms to Foucault's concept of 'epistemic violence'; a means for structuring the world based upon the assertion of objectivity and reason within a practice of subjugation. Spivak built upon Foucault's term in order to explain why it is so difficult for the subaltern to speak. Even if the corruption of the postcolonial state was not a product of the colonial stain, the freedom from corruption that the Bank's policies provide is the freedom to be subjugated to a neoliberal order, just as the freedom of Spivak's widow saved from the fire is the freedom to live as a colonial subject. More specifically, the corruption debate "bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world" (Bhabha, 1994: 171).

A particularly corrosive aspect of the epistemic violence enacted in the definition and treatment of corruption by international institutions is their enlisting of local 'partners' to enact and thus indigenize the hegemonic discourse; Cooke and Kothari's *Participation: the New Tyranny* (2001). It is in this sense that Fanon's description of the psychological cost borne by the colonized gives pause for thought; the impact of colonisation (and globalized post-colonisation) in inculcating the global South as a collective 'phobic object' requiring intervention and regulation by the regulatory institutions of the North.

What alternatives might exist to this structural injustice? Here we draw on Nancy Fraser (2005) who develops conditions for representation of a just social order which permit evading ideological discursive frames and eliminate dualisms of essential difference insider/outsiders; citizens/aliens; Europeans and others. In a later work Fraser (2012) further develops a conceptualization of justice through negation. Instead of developing a just social system by implementing universal standards of justice (as represented for example in TI's Corruption Index), she argues that justice is never experienced directly "Only when we contemplate what it would take to overcome injustice does our otherwise abstract concept of justice acquire any meaning".

Injustice, in Fraser's (2012) view, is a matter of objective victimization, a structural relation in which some exploit others and denies them the moral standing as subject of justice. Importantly, it is under the force of hegemonic discourses such as those of the World Bank and Transparency International that the exploited lack the means to interpret their situation as unjust. Contextualized justice – i.e. a common struggle against corruption– depends on the availability of discursive resources and interpretative schemas that permit its articulation and open expression. Further, such contextualized justice must be built within the challenging context of a transnationalized economic order and discursive space.

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