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The ‘War on Terror’ as Primitive Accumulation in Tunisia: US-Led Imperialism and the Post-2010-2011 Revolt/Security Conjuncture

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the rearticulation and reconfiguration of US-led imperialism vis-à-vis Tunisia in the aftermath of the 2010–2011 popular revolt. Challenging the prevalent economic-military binary in analyses of US-led imperialism in the region, it treats instead economic intervention in Tunisia as linked to and shaped by ‘security’ intervention, with the violence of the War on Terror laying the groundwork for a new wave of primitive accumulation. Employing conjunctural analysis, it considers how the 2015 attacks, largely targeting European tourists at a Sousse beach resort and the Bardo national museum, were mobilized to further Tunisia’s imbrications within imperialist security architecture through legal interventions, border violence, peripheral militarization, increased ‘security’ spending and neocolonial ‘expertise’, debt and racialized financialization. In doing so, the 2015 security conjuncture reinforced Tunisia’s peripheral status in the international system and enabled further surplus value drain, though not without resistance. The article concludes by reflecting on popular struggles and the current conjuncture, which is characterized not only by public health and economic crises, but also by the rise of a multipolar world order that, when combined with working class organization and mobilization, may provide an opening for Tunisia to delink from the imperialist core. Such a transformation would domore than any platitudes about human rights and ‘security sector reform’ to radically transform the nature of the Tunisian security state and the social relations it is designed to uphold.*

KEY WORDS: *Border making; Colonial-capitalism; Conjunctural analysis; Global south development; Imperialism; Militarization; Primitive accumulation; Racial capitalism; Security state; Tunisia; Unequal exchange*

Much of the critical work on the stunted nature of the 2010–2011 Tunisian revolt examines the counter-revolutionary role of Western states and US-led imperialist institutions, including the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the European Union (EU), in deepening Tunisia’s peripheral status and economic dependency on the imperialist core through conditioned loans and unfair trade agreements perpetuating unequal exchange and periphery-core value drain. These

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analyses point to the paradoxical deterioration of socio-economic conditions for Tunisia's working class in the years following the revolt, including high levels of inflation, depressed wages, increased unemployment, and growing food insecurity.¹ Even in these critical accounts, less attention is paid to military and other forms of 'security' intervention and the impact these have on class differentiation within Tunisia and polarized accumulation in the world system.

This article will challenge the prevalent economic-military binary to argue that imperialist economic intervention in Tunisia is often enabled and shaped by 'security' intervention, with the War on Terror (WoT) laying the groundwork for a new wave of primitive accumulation. Although it is more subtle than the kinds of direct military intervention witnessed in Libya and Syria, what I term Tunisia's *security dependency* nevertheless entails the use of force and organized state violence to maintain Tunisia's subordinate position in the global system. Similar to food and energy dependency, security dependency forms part of the larger 'structural issues' undermining any attempts at meaningful sovereignty.²

This more expansive perspective takes into consideration the various scales of intervention, including at both the state and societal level. While it deals with issues pertaining to arms sales, training, security 'cooperation', military bases and complex financial instruments designed to reproduce conditions of dependency and underdevelopment, it also explores how practices designed to manage the country's 'relative surplus population'³ also facilitate the super-exploitation and social disciplining of Tunisian workers. Building upon colonial legacies, these forms of intervention enable neocolonial accumulation and value drain, entrenching the power of Tunisia's comprador class to the detriment of worker and peasant liberation. In this sense, the analysis sheds lights on how interventions in the name of 'counterterror' both enable and are enabled by what Nikhil Singh describes as 'race making'.⁴ That is, the dynamics and processes through which securitized difference is (re)produced, exploited, and managed over time both within and across the borders of empire, traversing the domestic and global 'color line' to, in W.E.B. Du Bois' words, 'degrad[e] colored labor the world over'.⁵

This article treats race-making as central to how hierarchy and class domination are established, maintained, and obfuscated within and between states. Although there is a tendency in scholarly discussions, emanating from the global North, to focus on and isolate manifestations of anti-Black racism in Tunisia, this article instead considers the multiple and intersecting forms of race-making required by core-capital accumulation. It argues colonial-capitalist legacies and neocolonial social relations shape dominant articulations of race. This paper therefore addresses the mechanisms and dynamics of

¹ Amine Bouzaïene (2023) Subventions et transferts directs: un risqué pour 8 millions de Tunisiennes [Subsidies and direct transfers: a risk for 8 million Tunisians], in: *Ikyfada* (21 March). Available at: <https://inkyfada.com/fr/2023/03/21/subventions-transferts-directs-risque-tunisie/>, accessed March 27, 2023.

² Fadhel Kaboub and Fadil Aliriza (2019) Modern Monetary Theory: A Tool for the Global South? In conversation with Dr. Fadhel Kaboub, in: *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung* (22 November). Available at: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/publication/id/41284/modern-monetary-theory-a-tool-for-the-global-south>, accessed January 15, 2022.

³ Karl Marx (1867) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume 1, Part 1: *The Process of Capitalist Production* (New York, NY: Cosimo).

⁴ Nikhil Pal Singh (2017) *Race and America's Long War* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press).

⁵ W.E.B. DuBois (1925) Worlds of Color, In: *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 423–444.

the racialization of Tunisia as a non-white, dependent, peripheral state. It does so by linking this process to the racialization of Tunisia's popular classes, which includes peasants, fishermen, low-paid workers, working-class students, informal workers, petty traders, the unemployed and underemployed, as well as migrants largely from West Africa who often reside in Tunisia either as students or in transit to various western European countries as they seek ways to circumvent the EU's racist border regime.

To grasp how racialized modes of accumulation and value drain not only continued, but also deepened in the post-revolt period, despite a popular rejection of Tunisia's colonial-capitalist model of development, requires that we consider the strategies of obfuscation, or what Althusser describes as 'mystification', employed to present as radical transformation what was in fact a deepening of the status quo. For Althusser, the reality of class antagonisms of the capitalist state can be hidden as long as the illusion is maintained of the state as structurally separate from the economy. Maintaining the state's role as 'an instrument for the reproduction of the conditions of production,' in other words, the 'conditions of existence of the domination of the exploiting class' is the 'supreme objective [of] mystification'.⁶

The effectiveness of such a mystification is reinforced, as well as challenged during moments of crisis, when the violence of the state, exaggerated and unbound, is exposed for the role that it plays in enabling class domination. Crises are moments when the contradictions of capitalism are laid bare—demystified—and thus made vulnerable to critique and contestation. In this sense, as Marx contended, they have the potential to 'put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial', which is why the bourgeoisie respond to crises 'by enforced destruction of a mass of productive forces ... by the conquest of new markets, and by the more thorough exploitation of the old ones'.⁷

In this article, I approach the question of the security crisis through a theoretical framework that I call the *security conjuncture*. This pertains to that moment when the security state gets rearticulated, retrenched, and integrated further within a US-led imperialist security architecture designed to crush the 'mass of productive forces'—but also a moment when the role of the security state as facilitator of colonial-capitalist accumulation potentially is revealed and overturn. This article borrows from Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey's layered reading of conjunctures, examining these moments for what they can tell us about the 'different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work', in the Tunisian security state.⁸ In that sense, it is equally optimistic about the possibilities opened by the conjuncture for, in Hall's words, 'creat[ing] the new terrain, on which a different politics must form up'.⁹

Although the bulk of Tunisia's most formative security conjunctures can be traced back to the colonial era, as well as the two decades following Tunisia's formal independence in 1956, this article focuses on a shifting paradigm of the security conjuncture that has unfolded in the post-2010/2011 revolt context. Namely, the conjuncture following the 2015 attacks that targeted largely European tourists at a Sousse beach

⁶ Louis Althusser (2006) *Philosophy of the Encounter Later Writings, 1978-87*. Translated by G.M.G. Oshgarian (New York: Verso), p. 109.

⁷ Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx (2015) *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Classics), p. 17.

⁸ Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey (2010) *Interpreting the Crisis: Doreen Massey and Stuart Hall Discuss Ways of Understanding the Current Crisis*, *Soundings*, no. 44, Spring 2010, p. 57.

⁹ Stuart Hall (1988) *A Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso).

resort and the Bardo national museum. Employing a critical political economy approach, it assesses the role that ‘counterterror’ interventions have played in creating the conditions for ongoing primitive accumulation in Tunisia. Similar to past crises, the 2015 attacks were mobilized to integrate Tunisia further within the imperialist security architecture through legal interventions, border violence, peripheral militarization, increased ‘security’ spending, debt and racialized financialization. In doing so, the 2015 security conjuncture reinforced Tunisia’s peripheral status, enabling a further capitalist incorporation and transfer of surplus value to the imperialist core through often violent means.

While the article focuses on the rearticulation and reconfiguration of imperialist power in the post-revolt period, it also considers ongoing, as well as new forms of resistance that have emerged in opposition to Tunisia’s colonial-capitalist model of development and the primitive accumulation it engenders. The article explores popular movements around the production of oil in El Kamour and the phosphate industry in Gafsa as examples of struggles that target critical nodes within the extractive infrastructure. By halting value transfers, these forms of resistance are central to the struggle against imperialism, and to the pursuit of social and economic liberation in Tunisia.¹⁰ When taken together with the protest movement against state violence, led in large part by the same working class youth who have been criminalized and targeted by security apparatuses in the name of fighting terrorism, the current conjuncture of public health and economic crisis sparked by the outbreak of Covid and the US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine has laid bare the function of the Tunisian security state as currently configured: to enable unequal exchange, surplus value drain and imperialist core accumulation. Yet larger transformations underway to the world system portend new possibilities. Combined with working class organization and mobilization, the rise of a multipolar world order may provide an opening for Tunisia to delink from the imperialist core. By transforming the country’s material conditions, the structural changes enabled by delinking would go much further than any platitudes about human rights and ‘security sector reform’ to transform radically the nature of the Tunisian security state and the social relations it is designed to uphold.

Theorizing Race, Empire, and Security

The conceptual framework of racial capitalism helps us to move beyond the ‘exceptionality’ framing that has dominated critical security analyses, where ‘security’ is seen as ‘the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue as a special kind of politics or as above politics’.¹¹ Instead, the racial capitalist lens provides insight into the central role played by racialization in constituting the very ‘ontological condition of possibility for capitalism’.¹² Hundreds of years of enslavement and settler colonial rule have been discursively justified through the dehumanization of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, so that their land,

¹⁰ Manu Karuka (2019) *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Berkeley: University of California Press), p. 198.

¹¹ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (1998) *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

¹² Bikrum Gill (2021) A World in Reverse: The Political Ecology of Racial Capitalism, in: *Politics* (March), p. 2.

resources and bodies could be expropriated, exploited and commodified. In the colonies, racialization of Indigenous populations was required to enable the violence underpinning primitive accumulation and the shift it entailed from pre-capitalist to the capitalist mode of production. Mahfoud Bennoune distinguishes between examples of European 'primary' accumulation enabled by enclosures on the commons—what Woods referred to as 'agrarian origins of capitalism'—and the 'looting' that occurred in the colonies, pointing to the central role of brute violence in the latter.¹³ The strategies and logic of racial capitalism today in the global South can be seen as continuing the incomplete work of colonial-capitalist expansion.

The racial capitalist lens provides a conceptual framework for understanding primitive accumulation as ongoing within the periphery, as well as in the centre, with 'Blackness', as Charisse Burden-Stelley contends 'a capacious category of surplus value extraction essential to an array of political-economic functions, including accumulation, disaccumulation, debt, planned obsolescence, and absorption of the burdens of economic crises'.¹⁴ Such an analysis is crucial to understanding super-exploitation in the context of labour arbitrage, where class alone cannot explain 'above average rates of exploitation' or how and why workers are 'paid less than the cost of the reproduction of their labor power'.¹⁵ As colonial violence ushered in the first wave of primitive accumulation, today's US-led imperialist wars enable global South wealth drain insofar as they 'destroy wealth stocks, indenture natural wealth and labour, reduce the number of labourers, or force more people to become refugees, and hence lessen the wage bill'.¹⁶

World Systems and Dependency theorists, like Walter Rodney, Samir Amin and Immanuel Wallerstein,¹⁷ have challenged the racist assumptions underpinning 'modernization theory', including tropes of civilizational backwardness and social inferiority that are referenced to obscure the legacies of enslavement and colonialism in producing underdevelopment and global stratifications.¹⁸ Dependency/World Systems scholars instead point out how primitive accumulation under enslavement and colonization, as well as unequal exchange, enabled wealth 'transfers' and 'drain' from the global South to the North.¹⁹ Today, a more sophisticated mystification of the causes of the polarizing tendencies of global capitalism is achieved through what Jemima Pierre describes as the 'racial lexicon of development'.²⁰

¹³ Mahfoud Bennoune (1975) The Origin of the Algerian Proletariat, in: *Dialectical Anthropology* 1(3), pp. 201–224.

¹⁴ Charisse Burden-Stelley (2020) Modern U.S. Racial Capitalism: Some Theoretical Insights, in: *Monthly Review* 72(3), pp. 8–20. Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2020/07/01/modern-u-s-racial-capitalism/>, accessed March 30, 2023.

¹⁵ Intan Suwandi, Jamil Jonna and John Bellamy Foster (2019) Global Commodity Chains and the New Imperialism, *Monthly Review*, 70(10), pp. 1–24.

¹⁶ Ali Kadri (2014) *Arab Development Denied: Dynamics of Accumulation by Wars of Encroachment* (London: Anthem Press).

¹⁷ Walter Rodney (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Publishing House; and London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications); Samir Amin (1977) *Imperialism and Unequal Development Marxist Theory and Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press); Immanuel Wallerstein (1992) The West, Capitalism, and the Modern World-System, *Review*, 15 (4), pp. 561–619.

¹⁸ Burden-Stelley, Modern U.S. Racial Capitalism.

¹⁹ Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik (2021) *Capital and Imperialism: Theory, History, and the Present* (New York: Monthly Review Press).

²⁰ Jemima Pierre (2020) The Racial Vernaculars of Development: A View from West Africa, *American Anthropologist* 122 (1), pp. 86–98.

Combining theories of racial capitalism and dependency, a critical political economy approach views the ‘historical development of social formations dominated by capital’ as inextricably bound to the histories and afterlives of slavery and colonialism, as well as contemporary systems of racialized and gendered exploitation, domination and dispossession.²¹ This approach provides a historical contextualization that, in turn, offers the opportunity to grasp the numerous and overlapping forms of violence, material and structural, that have enabled capitalist expansion and accumulation in the post-revolt conjuncture analysed in this article.

Tunisia and the Making of a Peripheral and Dependent Security State

In the Tunisian context, as elsewhere throughout the global South, colonial legacies influenced and, in some instances, constituted central elements of the country’s post-colonial superstructure, including its legal system. Tunisia not only inherited France’s expansive penal code, which enabled the criminalization of dissent and poverty, but also disciplinary tools like the ‘state of emergency’, allowing the government to further constrain political space in moments of ‘crisis’. The conjunctures produced by the anti-colonial struggle were central to state formation, in particular the moulding of Tunisia’s institutions of organized violence as they were forged in the everyday surveillance and policing of all forms of nationalist expression. They were further honed during the violent repression of the armed resistance- the *fellagha* (the ‘peasant and landless guerrillas’ of Tunisia’s anti-colonial struggle)²²- in particular between the years of 1952–1956.

Intense intra-nationalist struggle marked Tunisia’s era of anti-colonial struggle, culminating in the 1961 assassination of Salah Ben Youssef, a Third Worldist, pan-Maghrebi, and nationalist leader, propounding a more radical understanding of decolonization, including a vision of regional independence and complete sovereignty over the country’s institutions, economy and natural resources.²³ What followed instead was the ascension to power of the Western-backed Habib Bourguiba as the country’s first post-independence president, who adhered to a ‘gradualist’ approach to independence. Ben Youssef excoriated Bourguiba for signing the 1955 Conventions. These resulted in France retaining financial, economic, military and administrative domination, producing what Ben Youssef described as a form of ‘fictional self-government’ for the Tunisian government.²⁴

Tunisia remained close to its former colonial power, only achieving the formal independence of its security institutions in 1958. Its post-independence trajectory, accelerating during the Cold War, entailed closer relations with the US, as that North

²¹ Joel Beinin, Bassam Haddad and Sheren Seikaly (2020) *A Critical Political Economy of the Middle East & North Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), p. 2.

²² Omar Safi (2020) *The Intelligence State in Tunisia: Security and Mukhabarat, 1881-1965* (London: I.B. Tauris), p. 117.; Max Ajl (2018) Auto-centered Development and Indigenous Technics: Slaheddine el-Amami and Tunisian Delinking, *Journal of Peasant Studies* 6(46), pp. 1240–1263.

²³ Salah Ben Youssef (1955) Note de Salah Ben Youssef aux États arabes à propos des accords francotunisien [Note from Salah Ben Youssef to the Arab States on the Franco-Tunisian agreements] (17 May). Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/note_from_salah_ben_youssef_to_the_arab_states_on_the_agreement_between_france_and_tunisia_17_may_1955-en-dde854e5-3c8a-4e12-b1a5-d032549514a4.html, accessed March 30, 2023.

²⁴ Ibid.

American settler colonial state replaced the UK and France as the primary force securing the interests of Western capital in the region. However, US military involvement in Tunisia dates back even further, to the period of French colonial rule. The US sold weapons and provided other forms of military support both bilaterally and through the US-dominated NATO to help France quell anti-colonial resistance. In 1954, Ben Youssef remarked that the US government, despite its pretensions to supporting decolonization and the 'principles of liberty and justice' was in fact supplying weapons to the French government—'the means of exterminating' the Tunisian armed resistance—facilitating colonial 'assassination, plunder, pillage and rape'.²⁵

The policy environment of Bourgiba's post independence government was shaped by the prevalence of nationalist/socialist models of development at the regional level, combined with the presence of radical labor and peasant movements, , resulting in Tunisia's 'short lived' experiment in economic decolonization and 'self-centred development'.²⁶ However, geopolitical developments throughout the 20th century reversed this process, ensuring that dependence on the global North would become a more permanent feature of the Tunisian state. Most importantly, the US' systematic campaign to undermine independent expressions of global South's political will in the context of the Cold War, which included the first wave of the neoliberal counter-revolution from the 1970s—1990s. Following well-rehearsed patterns elsewhere in the global South, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that restructured Tunisia's economy during these years. These SAPs privatized state-owned enterprises, reduced government spending on public goods and subsidies, lowered tariffs and increased access to the economy for foreign goods and finance. Ultimately, they marked a return to colonial patterns of extraction, accumulation, and control. They contributed to growing levels of inequality and poverty, accelerating proletarianization of the rural population, while squeezing the postcolonial middle class. This, in turn, fostered a burgeoning class of unemployed and underemployed ('relative surplus population') that only helped the Western-backed ruling class to further discipline and exploit labor.

The US 'security' relations with Tunisia deepened in the post-Cold War era, with an increasing focus on 'terrorism'. As Tunisia became one of the first countries to express full support for and cooperation with US regional operations after 9/11, the War on Terror (WoT) years paved the way for Tunisia's integration within US imperialist security architecture. Under the pretext of the WoT, Ben Ali retrenched the Tunisian security state by acquiring the material and discursive tools to pacify temporarily unrest during a period of neoliberal restructuring. In doing so, this enabled new forms of vulnerability in relation to class and spatially polarized patterns of capital accumulation.²⁷

As in the past, global governance institutions played an important role in reinforcing the security state by providing political cover at a time of increased repression. This period of Ben Ali's rule was accompanied by an increasingly aggressive approach by IFIs to integrate Tunisia's economy more fully within the global capitalist system. The EU-Tunisia

²⁵ Salah Ben Youssef (1954) Tunisia's Struggle for Independence, *Pakistan Horizon* 7 (2), p. 60.

²⁶ Chafik Ben Rouine (2022) Economic Decolonisation and the Role of the Central Bank in Postcolonial Development in Tunisia, *Africa and Development / Afrique et Développement* 47(1), p. 156; Joel Beinin (2015) *Workers and Thieves: Labor Movements and Popular Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

²⁷ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

Association Agreement (AA) signed in 1995 was central to this process. The AA required a restructuring of Tunisia's policy environment (including reduction in customs duties, tariffs, and taxes on imports) as a means of liberalizing more fully Tunisia's economy for the benefit of European capital. While it claimed to enhance 'free trade' in an equally beneficial manner to Tunisia and the EU, the AA actually served to undermine the capacity of Tunisia's productive sectors, deepening the country's trade deficit with the EU as well as accelerating currency devaluation and inequality.²⁸

The WoT provided an opportunity for colonial knowledge production concerning 'security' to obscure the neo-colonial causes of unequal wealth distribution and de-development and focus instead on 'terrorism' as the leading cause of social malaise. Between 2001 and the 2010 revolt, security aid to Tunisia increased, as well as military training and weapons sales from both the US and the EU. Political-economic restructuring continued apace, including the rolling back of social programs and spending on public goods, 'deregulation, [and] reducing the role of the state to police functions'.²⁹ From a discursive perspective, the Tunisian security state reached back to its colonial repertoire to normalize further retrenchment. Claims to fighting 'terrorism' were key to colonial counter-insurgency, as well as everyday strategies of disciplining labor and controlling the peasantry. The post-independence state rehashed these discourses to justify the repression of labor, peasant and other popular movements in the name of defeating threats to national security and *haybat ad-dawla* (state prestige).³⁰

Ironically, these interventions would pale in comparison to Tunisia's accelerated integration into the US-led imperialist security architecture in the years following the 2010–2011 revolt, despite the latter's clear anti-imperialist orientation. This security integration paralleled and intersected in important ways with forms of imperialist financial and monetary intervention, which sought to integrate Tunisia further within the global capitalist economy, removing outstanding barriers for Western encroachment. These included the IMF's and World Bank's role in pushing through the liberalization of capital flows and establishing the central bank's 'independence', ending its currency stabilization role and ability to lend to the state so that the government is now forced to borrow from private banks at high interest rates, harming its liquidity.³¹ In exchange for dependency-inducing loans, the IFIs have also demanded currency devaluation, privatization of remaining state-owned companies, introducing regressive taxation, reduction of the budget deficit (through cutting government spending) and other 'business friendly' economic measures including a new Public Private Partnership Law.³² With claims to help advance 'sound finance' in Tunisia, these

²⁸ Layla Riahi and Hamza Hamouchene (2020) Deep and comprehensive dependency: How a trade agreement with the EU could devastate the Tunisian economy, in *TNI*. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/deep-and-comprehensive-dependency>, accessed January 15, 2022.

²⁹ Karuka, *Empires Tracks*.

³⁰ Corinna Mullin and Brahim Rouabah (2016) Discourses of Power and State Formation: The State of Emergency from Protectorate to Post-uprising Tunisia, *Middle East Law and Governance* 8(2-3), pp. 151–178.

³¹ Jihen Chandoul (2017) Tunisia and IMF: Transitional Injustice, In: *Arab NGO Network for Development*. Available at: <https://www.annd.org/uploads/summernote/IMF-TUNISIA-PolicyBrief1612565201.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2022.

³² L'Observatoire tunisien de l'Economie (2015) Note de synthèse à propos du projet de loi sur les PPP en Tunisie [Summary note on the draft law on PPPs in Tunisia], in *OTE*. Available at: <http://www.economie-tunisie.org/fr/observatoire/analyseeconomics/projet-loi-ppp-tunisie>, accessed January 15, 2022.

policy reforms harken back to colonial macroeconomics and their impact is the same: to reinforce racialized structures of global domination.³³

The 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement' (DCFTA) currently under negotiation with the EU would see further value leakage, in particular in relation to the agriculture and fishing sectors, as well as erosion of Tunisia's sovereignty and an even greater degree of EU legislative and institutional intervention.³⁴

The Tunisian revolt and the neoliberal assault on the state that it both provoked and responded to, shaped the larger context for Tunisia's enhanced security integration in the post 2010–2011 period. Together with the two terrorist attacks in 2015, these events formed the particular conjuncture through which Tunisia's more complete integration within a US-led imperialist security architecture was secured. Tunisia's WoT provided a cover for the security state and an opportunity to re-valorize the institutions of organized violence in the aftermath of the 2010–2011 revolt that had rebelled against the police state.³⁵

Racialized Political Economy of Tunisia's Post-Revolt Security Conjuncture

The Tunisian revolt had been feted by the international community as a model 'Arab Spring' uprising with its relatively peaceful transition, complete with a new constitution and two successful rounds of elections. The country's fall from the international community's grace came, not as a result of the government's failure to achieve structural change capable of addressing the central political and socio-economic demands of the popular classes, but rather due to the highly mediatized 2015 attacks on the iconic Bardo museum and Sousse beach resort. Most treatments of the 2015 attacks focus on the 'security' angle, ruminating on the socio-political factors behind the rise of 'jihadi terrorism' in Tunisia along with 'counter-terror' policy prescriptions. A conjunctural approach instead examines what this specific moment reveals about changing social relations, class formation, and modes of accumulation in light of Tunisia's deepening imbrication within a US-led imperialist security architecture.

The 2015 attacks served as a pretext to draw Tunisia into new alliances and agreements that deepened Tunisia's imbrications within imperial security architecture and global capitalist circuits of trade and finance. As Dhouha Ben Youssef noted, many aspects of Tunisia's security cooperation with Western partners are now statutory requirements, enshrined in Tunisia's 2015 anti-terror law.³⁶ Adding yet another important layer to the transnational web of alliances, Tunisia announced its new status as a 'major non-NATO ally of the US' shortly after the 2015 attacks. This relationship entails further training, intelligence sharing and research projects, facilitating a growing national security dependence on the US. It also requires Tunisia's complicity with imperialist regional machinations by serving as a 'conduit' for AFRICOM's training of

³³ Ndongo Samba Sylla (2021) Neoliberalism's Colonial Origins, in: *Money on the Left*. Available at: <https://moneyontheleft.org/2021/06/14/neoliberalisms-colonial-origins/>, accessed March 30, 2023.

³⁴ Riahi and Hamouchene, Deep and comprehensive dependency.

³⁵ Afef Abrougui (2014) Tunisia: 'I Too Set a Police Station on Fire,' in: *Global Voices* (26 April). Available at: <https://globalvoices.org/author/afef-abrougui/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

³⁶ Dhouha Ben Youssef (2015) Hacking Team: The company that spied on you during the Tunisian revolution! In: *Nawaat* (August 1). Available at: <https://nawaat.org/2015/08/01/hacking-team-the-company-that-spied-on-you-during-the-tunisian-revolution/>, accessed December 19, 2022.

African military leaders primarily through its ‘African Lion’ program, as well as outsourcing its military for interventions across the continent.³⁷ Under this framework, Tunisia’s military joined the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali and currently is participating in five UN missions across the continent with over ‘200 military and security experts’.³⁸ Similar to other areas of imperialist security encroachment, this also translated into a process of normalization with Israel. Israel’s status as a major non-NATO ally and central actor in the military/security-industrial-complex of the region inevitably will deepen Tunisia’s unofficial relations with the settler colonial state despite persistent popular Tunisian opposition to these relations and strong pro-Palestine sentiment.³⁹

The 2015 security conjuncture also has witnessed the growth of the US’s physical military presence in Tunisia, where the Pentagon has deployed a team of several dozen special operations troops. In the wake of the March Bardo attack, US forces provided ‘operational assistance’ to a ‘counterterrorism operation’ in the historically marginalized mining basin region of Gafsa. US military personnel and drones have operated out of the Sidi Ahmed Air Base in Bizerte.⁴⁰ Under the auspices of AFRICOM, the US Marines have participated in at least one direct armed confrontation in the border town of Kasserine. The Air Force component of AFRICOM also is used to fly intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions across Tunisia from the Italian bases of Sigonella and Pantelleria.⁴¹

On par with the neoliberal governance response to global South economic crisis, the wave of globalized counterterror policies ostensibly proffers technical and objective knowledge deemed necessary to remedy the social malaise of these countries. However, these policies remain profoundly political, reinforcing the domestic and international hierarchies that enable surplus value drain and transfer to the imperialist core.

Law as Class Warfare: Legislating ‘Counterterror’ and Precaritising Labour

As with most other WoT terrains, so in Tunisia, the targets of counterterror practices most often have been (young) men from the popular classes. Nonetheless, a serious class analysis of Tunisia’s WoT is missing. Being a peripheral state, a class analysis of Tunisia requires an assessment of ‘the articulation of local classes with regional and global markets, states and empires’, as well as of the legal-institutional forms ‘that sustain and situate’ classes within these ‘complex’ local and global ‘social

³⁷ U.S. Department of State (2021) Telephonic Briefing with U.S. Army Europe-Africa. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/telephonic-briefing-with-u-s-army-europe-africa/>, accessed April 18, 2022.

³⁸ Tunisia Africa Press (2021) Tunisia Observes International Day of UN Peacekeepers, in: *TAP* (29 December). Available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202105290187.html>, accessed January 15, 2022.

³⁹ Nada Trigui (2016) Mossad blamed as Tunisians protest assassination of engineer, in: *Middle East Eye* (21 December). Available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/mossad-blamed-tunisians-protest-assassination-engineer>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁴⁰ Adam Entous and Missy Ryan (2016), U.S. has secretly expanded its global network of drone bases to North Africa, in: *Washington Post* (26 October). Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-has-secretly-expanded-its-global-network-of-drone-bases-to-north-africa/2016/10/26/ff19633c-9b7d-11e6-9980-50913d68eacb_story.html, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁴¹ Héní Nsaibia (2018) America Is Quietly Expanding Its War in Tunisia, in: *The National Interest* (September 18). Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/america-quietly-expanding-its-war-tunisia-31492>, accessed December 20, 2022.

formations'.⁴² With its roots in colonial rule, the legal-institutional setting of the dependent peripheral state is designed to protect capital and to maintain racialized modes of accumulation by facilitating the global system of labor arbitrage.

Though spared the kind of US-led military intervention witnessed in Iraq, Libya and Syria, Tunisia's sovereignty nevertheless has been disciplined. In addition to the demonstrative effect of direct imperialist invasion in neighboring states, the neoliberal counter-revolution must be seen as part of the hybrid war attacking Tunisian sovereignty. The impact of the latter is similar to direct military intervention, and it includes the 'disengage[ment] of as many workers as possible from a given productive activity' as well as the setting of a 'persistently lower ... wage rate making subsistence goods beyond the reach of many'.⁴³ Counterterror has provided a convenient cover for political-economic and legal-institutional changes that help to, in Kadri's words 'suppres[s] the demands of people for better lives, stripping them of their power to negotiate and reducing the value of their labor and their environment to pittance in money form'.⁴⁴ In other words, counterterror works in its various guises to discipline labor facilitate surplus value extraction and appropriation.

Tunisia's economy today is marked by high levels of unemployment (20.5 percent or higher), a large informal sector (53 percent of the total labor force), poorly compensated labor in industries located at the lower end of the global value chain, and the marginalization of non-exporting activities.⁴⁵ Although IFI discourse tends to attribute this situation to the conditions of the labor market, Kadri contends that real wages in the global South are in fact 'determined by the degree of monopoly and leakages to external markets'.⁴⁶ Super exploitation reflects these leakages, which is why the commodification of labor can be seen as 'serv[ing] the purpose of denationalizing resources'.⁴⁷ The IFIs mandated currency devaluation in Tunisia has contributed to wage depreciation. The minimum wage is currently 323.5 dinars per month, around 100 euro, with workers in the informal sector, particularly women, earning even less.⁴⁸

When reflecting on the superstructure of peripheral capitalism, the legislative changes required by Free Trade agreements and Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) often first come to mind, as they shape the institutional landscape governing economic transactions. However, it is equally important to consider the penal code, which is designed to manage and control the popular classes.

In Tunisia, the French Penal Code of 1913 is still largely in place, enabling the criminalization of dissent. Other laws, specifically targeting working class young men, like Law 52,⁴⁹ also have their roots in the colonial era. A common feature of the capitalist carceral state is a prison system designed to keep those once ensnared within its

⁴² Beinín, Haddad and Seikaly, *A Critical Political Economy*, p. 5

⁴³ Ali Kadri (2019) Resist to exist, *International Development Economic Associates* (March 12). Available at: <https://www.networkideas.org/featured-articles/2019/03/resist-exist/>, accessed December 20, 2022.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Riahi and Hamouchene, Deep and comprehensive dependency.

⁴⁶ Kadri, *Arab Development Denied*, p. 185

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 195.

⁴⁸ Riahi and Hamouchene, Deep and comprehensive dependency.

⁴⁹ Sam Kimball (2021) Anti-Drug Laws Are Being Used To Crush Dissent in the Birthplace of the Arab Spring, In: *Vice* (24 September). Available at: <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wx5mxz/anti-drug-laws-are-being-used-to-crush-dissent-in-the-birthplace-of-the-arab-spring>, accessed January 15, 2022.

walls in a perpetual state of criminality, by making it difficult for individuals to find employment, and therefore socially reproduce, after incarceration.

As in other parts of the world, Tunisia's WoT has entailed expansive counterterror legislation, contributing to the process of disengaging and cheapening labor. Together with the unreconstructed penal code, as well as policies and practices adopted to maintain public order, Tunisia's Western-backed 2003 anti-terror law, modelled on the US Patriot Act, formed a central component of its national security state architecture. The law's vague definition of terrorism, including everything from 'damage to public and private property', to 'disturbing public order, peace or international security' and 'harming public transportation', allowed for the criminalisation of various forms of dissent.⁵⁰

The post-revolt elected Troika government's stated commitment to revise the 2003 law, which entangled thousands of working class young Tunisian men within the criminal justice system, was impacted by the 2015 security conjuncture. In January 2014, the Council of Ministers submitted a version of the reformed draft law to the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). However, protracted disagreement and the upcoming October 2014 legislative elections ended up suspending the voting procedures. The newly elected parliament was actually holding hearings with military generals on a draft of the bill at the time of the Bardo attack and, when the Sousse attack took place, the context was ripe for the fast-tracking of the final version of the bill, which was passed on July 25, 2015.

The 2015 anti-terror legislation was equally, if not more restrictive, than its 2003 version. Some of the most pressing issues identified by human rights organizations include prolonged incommunicado detention and limits to the due process rights of terrorism suspects, capital punishment for terrorist acts that lead to death, as well as a 'broad and ambiguous' definition of terrorism that criminalizes a wide range of political dissent and forms of social protest—including acts 'prejudicing private and public property, vital resources, infrastructures, means of transport and communication, IT systems or public services'.⁵¹ Combined with a renewed state of emergency (the previous one had been deployed on 15 January 2011 and was only lifted in March 2014), the effect of these counterterror measures was to put a damper on social movements.⁵²

Tunisia's counterterror legislation, amended in 2019, also has contributed to the increased militarization of everyday policing and to mass incarceration. It has enabled aggressive raids, arbitrary searches, and house arrests, resulting in the killing of numerous suspected terrorists in 'hot pursuit' over the years, with very little oversight or accountability.⁵³ Over one hundred thousand people, or one percent of the Tunisian

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch (2014) An Analysis of Tunisia's Draft Counterterrorism Law, in: *HRW* (July 7). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/07/07/analysis-tunisia-draft-counterterrorism-law>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁵¹ Human Rights (2015) Tunisia: Counterterror Law Endangers Right, in: *HRW* (July 31). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/sq/node/279831>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁵² Amnesty International (2016) Tunisia: Arrests and prison sentences show disproportionate use of emergency laws, in: *Amnesty International*. Available at: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/3459/2016/en/, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁵³ Amal Amraoui (2015) Clash entre la Justice et le ministère de l'Intérieur [Clash between the Ministers of Justice and the Interior], in: *Nawaat* (November 30). Available at: <http://nawaat.org/portail/2015/11/30/clash-entre-la-justice-et-le-ministere-de-linterieur/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

population, were arrested in the seven months following the Bardo attacks.⁵⁴ Similar to normal policing practices, the state of emergency does not affect all communities in the same way. During colonial times, Tunisian workers, peasants, and political activists mostly were targeted. Today, although the state of emergency still is designed to safeguard the same colonial-capitalist interests of the past, this beleaguers peasants in militarized zones, the working class neighborhoods and politically marginalized groups.

Racialized Accumulation through Border-Making, Peripheral Militarization and Border Violence

Western pressure to militarize borders represents another salient feature of Tunisia's security conjuncture. Although externally backed border policies claim to block the movement of terrorist bodies, weapons and finance, a genealogy of border violence reveals their colonial pedigree. The colonial border-making project was concerned with establishing internal and external borders through military conquest, land expropriation, enclosures, and new spatial orderings demarcating colonial jurisdictions that enabled different forms of wealth extraction and the primitive accumulation of colonial racial capitalism. Tunisia's imbrications within imperialist security border architecture can be traced through several earlier conjunctures. It begins with the 1910 Franco-Ottoman accords used by the French to demarcate Tunisia's official borders, it continues with the militarization of the country's borders in 1957, the so-called establishment of the 'Morice Line', put in place to halt the flow of weapons and fighters in the context of the anti-colonial struggles in Algeria and Tunisia, and includes the 1958 French raid of the Tunisian border village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef.⁵⁵ Western preoccupation with Tunisia's borders have been a feature of post-independence rule.

Immediately following the June 2015 Sousse attacks, Tunisia was hit by a deluge of neocolonial security funding and 'expertise' claiming the necessity of militarizing Tunisia's border with Libya. Within days of the attack, work began on the construction of a 250-kilometer border barrier, entailing a system of fences, sand walls, trenches and moats, while covering the portion of the border that is north of the closed military zone around Tunisia's southern desert.⁵⁶ Like colonial border making, the current episode disrupts the deep economic, cultural and familial ties of cross-border communities.⁵⁷ Border technologies and practices also are designed to control informal economic activities—often referred to as smuggling—or what Hamza Meddeb describes as the 'survival strategies' of surplus populations 'with a common thread of

⁵⁴ Agence France Presse (2015) Tunisie : premières arrestations en lien avec l'attentat de Sousse [Tunisia : first arrests linked to the Sousse attack], In : *Huffington Post Fr* (June 29). Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2015/06/29/attentat-sousse-tunisie-arrestations-international-terrorisme_n_7686736.html, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁵⁵ Omar Safi (2020) *The Intelligence State in Tunisia: Security and Mukhabarat, 1881-1965* (London: Bloomsbury Academic).

⁵⁶ Carlotta Gall (2015) Tunisia plans to build antiterrorism wall along border with Libya, In: *New York Times* (July 09). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/09/world/africa/tunisia-plans-to-build-antiterrorism-wall-along-border-with-libya.html>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁵⁷ Corinna Mullin and Braham Rouabah (2018) Decolonizing Tunisia's Border Violence: Moving Beyond Imperial Structures and Imaginaries, in: *Viewpoint* (February 1). Available at: <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/decolonizing-tunisias-border-violence-moving-beyond-imperial-structures-imaginaries/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

resistance to the forces of exclusion'.⁵⁸ Similar to the state-organized violences of the US-Mexico borderland, Tunisia's militarized borders produce new vulnerabilities for the already heavily policed poor, whose labor can be more readily exploited as a result.⁵⁹ Habib Ayeb has noted that for many living in Tunisia's border communities, the border represents 'the materialization of their social and spatial marginalization'—a dispossession of the periphery that enables accumulation in both local and global centers.⁶⁰

The targets of Tunisia's border violence include the excessive and out-of-place movements of those coming and going from states on the WoT radar, including Iraq, Libya, and Syria.⁶¹ Individuals (mostly young men) are monitored through the S17 program, which derives from the French word '*signalisation*' (signalling). The S17 program has prevented over 30,000 Tunisians from travelling to war-torn areas. Intersecting with the racialized violence regulating and disciplining the movement of individuals across Tunisia's exterior borders, restrictions on the internal movement of Tunisia's poor and working class have multiplied. These include police check points within and between marginalized urban and rural geographies that often are set up after incidents of political violence. They also establish and enforce an increasing number of military zones, including along Tunisia's borders,⁶² the 'ungovernable spaces' of the Sahara desert, as well as, from 2017, Tunisia's 'production zones'—sites of natural resource extraction, such as the Gafsa mining basin and the oil installations in Tataouine.⁶³ Military zones in Tunisia are governed by both articles 39 to 42 of the penal code and the code of military justice;⁶⁴ that is, individuals arrested in these zones are subjected to military tribunals, undermining the right to a fair trial and due process guarantees.

Individuals interpolated by internal borders become vulnerable both to state violence and labor exploitation, as their suspect position renders them unemployable in the formal economy. Similar to the form and function of colonial repression in sites of extraction, the militarization of peripheral zones of production today cheapens labor, while maintaining a low exchange value for multiform commodities, such as oil and phosphates,⁶⁵ through imperialist institutional intervention and ruling class policies.

⁵⁸ Hamza Meddeb (2016) Young People and Smuggling in the Kasserine Region of Tunisia: Stories of Dispossession and the Dynamics of Exclusion, in: *International Alert* (May 216). Available at: <https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Tunisia-Young-People-Smuggling-EN-2016.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁵⁹ Gilberto Rosas (2006) The Managed Violences of the Borderlands: Treacherous Geographies, Policeability, and the Politics of Race, *Latino Studies* (4), pp. 401–18.

⁶⁰ Habib Ayeb (2016) Après Ben-Guerdane : dépossessions, déstructurations et insécurité alimentaire dans le Sud-est tunisien [After Ben-Guerdane: dispossessions, destructurings and food insecurity in the south-east of Tunisia], in: *Jadaliyya* (April 23) Available at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33192>, accessed December 19, 2022.

⁶¹ Darryl Li (2011) Hunting the 'Out-of-Place Muslim': A Strange Journey, in: *South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection*, (May 31). Available at: https://www.academia.edu/636016/Hunting_the_Out_of_Place_Muslim_, accessed December 19, 2022.

⁶² DCAF Tunisie (2014) Arrêté républicain n° 2014-70 du 11 avril 2014, portant proclamation d'une zone d'opérations militaires. *Le Centre de Genève pour la gouvernance du secteur de la sécurité* (11 April). Available at: <https://legislation-securite.tn/law/44192>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁶³ Mullin and Rouabah, Decolonizing Tunisia's Border Violence

⁶⁴ DCAF Tunisie, Arrêté républicain n° 2014-70 du 11 avril 2014. Available at: <https://legislation-securite.tn/law/44192>, accessed December 19, 2022.

⁶⁵ Rebecca Gruskin (2021) The value within multiform commodities: North African phosphates and global markets in the interwar period, *Journal of Global History* 16(3), p. 334.

Military zones often encompass fertile agricultural lands, which have not been integrated fully into the capitalist economy. Security then becomes a pretext used to accelerate the process of primitive accumulation whereby the direct producer is separated from the means of production, proletarianizing peasants and bolstering the reserve army of labor in the periphery.⁶⁶ By creating a military zone, the government creates a buffer zone to protect the foreign (largely Western) corporations engaging in ecologically degrading forms of extraction, including fracking, from protesters, as well as the prying eyes of journalists and researchers. For example, the 2017 establishment of a military zone around the oil and gas sites in Kebili enabled the Franco-British company Perenco to engage in environmentally hazardous extractive activities in the El Franig concession.⁶⁷ Located in the El Farouar village of the Kebili governorate, this area is surrounded by palm groves and oases, as well as multiple surface water points where livestock and wild animals drink: 'Perenco's activities represent a potential danger to local flora and fauna if drinking water is contaminated by groundwater'.⁶⁸

As with other dimensions of imperialist security architecture, the pretexts are malleable and in constant flux. Demonstrating Tunisia's expected role as a regional enforcer of the EU's violent border practices to secure its place in a racialized colonial hierarchy of global South compliance, the border wall soon came to be described as crucial to 'stem the flow of illegal immigrants'. The list of racialized dangers emanating from within the African continent that Tunisia is expected to block from reaching Europe's pristine shores includes 'militants, firearms and drugs'.⁶⁹

Dominant academic and policy discourses assume an inevitable and objective rationality to peripheral militarization and border security, obscuring the contingent and detailed histories and numerous instances of violence at the core of border making.⁷ They also mystify the role of imperialist interests behind this violence, including incorporation of additional non-capitalist social relations into the capitalist mode of production, maintenance of a low exchange value for multiform commodities, peasant proletarianization, and expansion of the ranks of Tunisia's reserve army of labor. At the same time, border making practices and border violence reproduce the racialized hierarchies of the global political economy, by facilitating certain movements (i.e. of high value added goods, finance capital, 'white'/wealthy travellers and weapons traversing north/South borders in exchange for undervalued commodities traversing the border in the opposite direction), while disciplining and controlling others (i.e. those movements deemed 'excessive'- of racialized, gendered, classed bodies).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Prabhat Patnaik (2019) Contemporary Capitalism and the World of Work, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 8(1-2), pp. 303–316.

⁶⁷ Alexandre Brutelle (2022) Soil fracturing: Perenco's hazardous operations in Tunisia, in: *Inkyfada* (January 11). Available at: <https://inkyfada.com/en/2022/01/11/investigation-perenco-tunisia/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Jack Detsch (2018) Pentagon Partners with Germany on Tunisia Border Security, in: *Al Monitor* (February 23). Available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/02/pentagon-partner-germany-tunisia-border-security.html> accessed 15 January 2022, accessed December 20, 2022.

⁷⁰ Harsha Walia (2013) *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland: AK Press); Hagar Kotef (2015) *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility* (Durham: Duke University Press).

'Security' Spending, Debt, and Neocolonial Accumulation

In the broader post-revolt conjuncture, Tunisia's 'security' budget has expanded steadily, growing from \$469 million in 2010 to close to \$2.5 billion in 2021, with around \$1.4 billion for the Ministry of Interior and \$1.2 for the Ministry of Defense, constituting close to 6 percent⁷¹ of the budget.⁷² Part of this budget is covered by security aid from governments like France and Germany, which have provided tens of millions in aid, mostly in the domain of counterterrorism since 2011. US aid far surpasses that of Tunisia's other partners, with \$757 million in military and security cooperation over the past seven years and a noticeable rise in 2022, growing from \$106.4 million to \$112.1 million. US military assistance has increased 350 percent compared to pre-revolt figures and the country is now the second largest recipient of US defense aid in North Africa and the Sahel region after Egypt.

The bulk of this aid (\$85 million for the 2022 budget) comes in the form of Foreign Military Funding (FMF), which requires purchases of US military equipment, hence subsidizing the US military/security-industrial-complex. The breakdown also includes \$22.8 million in International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), which entails 'corrections reform' and 'law enforcement' training, enhancing 'capacities' in 'crowd control, cybercrimes, forensics, and multiple threat training', as well as \$2.3 million to cover training for Tunisian military personnel in the US (or elsewhere) by the US military.⁷³ While this increased spending is justified to safeguard Tunisia's 'democratic transition' in the face of terrorist threats, in a 2020 trip to the country, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper betrayed the New Cold War interests behind this cooperation, stating that Tunisia is central to countering the 'malign, coercive, and predatory behavior' of 'Moscow and Beijing'.⁷⁴

Echoing the former colonial security infrastructures, there is a strong institutional component to Tunisia's contemporary integration within imperialist security architecture. For example, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), launched in 2005, is a central mechanism through which African states become locked into these security arrangements. The program is described as a 'multi-faceted, multi-year US strategy aimed at developing resilient institutions that are capable of preventing and responding to terrorism in a holistic, long-term manner'.⁷⁵ Similar to INCLE, the program also claims a 'reform' agenda for the various security apparatuses as well as the 'criminal justice system' more broadly and includes a 'community policing' component. In the US context, 'community policing' programs have been critiqued as a form of 'liberal pacification' that has 'enabled and continues to facilitate ... a neo-colonial

⁷¹ Trading Economics (2021) Tunisia Military Expenditure- % of GDP, in: *Trading Economics*. Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/tunisia/military-expenditure-percent-of-gdp-wb-data.html>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁷² MENA Defense (2021) Tunisia to receive more US military aid in 2022, in: *MENA Defense* (November 21). Available at: <https://www.menadefense.net/north-africa/tunisia-to-receive-more-us-military-aid-in-2022/#:~:text=In%20seven%20years%20Tunisia%20will,is%20around%201.2%20billion%20dollars>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁷³ U.S. Embassy in Tunisia, International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) Section. Available at: <https://tn.usembassy.gov/embassy/tunis/inl-section/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁷⁴ Mark Esper (2020) Secretary of Defense Tweet (October 5). Available at: <https://twitter.com/esperdod/status/131318910452852327>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁷⁵ U.S. State Department (2019) Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/trans-sahara-counterterrorism-partnership/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

social order...producing and reproducing' race and class stratifications.⁷⁶ As the world's most notorious carceral state, the US houses 22 percent of the globe's incarcerated population and is under constant censure from domestic and international rights organizations. Thus, it is counterintuitive to have the US involved in 'prison reform' in Tunisia, while the latter forms part of the TSCTP's stated efforts to develop an 'institutional foundation for counterterrorism and related capabilities'.⁷⁷ While these programs claim to modernize, increase transparency and streamline human rights within the security apparatuses, they further militarize and imbricate global South institutions within imperialist security architecture.

Counterterror cooperation is a characteristically unequal 'partnership' that reinforces the global color line. By consolidating the development-security nexus, these alliances, and the expenses they incur, contribute to Tunisia's increasing debt, which currently stands at nearly 102 billion dinars, or 81.5 percent of GDP.⁷⁸ Debt is one of the central mechanisms of capitalist accumulation in the global economy today and plays a key role in securing a country's dependent and peripheral status in the US-led world system.⁷⁹ Tunisia's expanding security budget also has signaled a lucrative site of investment for capital, and the security dependency relationship fostered by the US government over the years ensures US companies stand to benefit handsomely. Standing at 63 percent, the market share of US companies selling to Tunisia under the category of 'Arms and Ammunition' was 'larger than Italy's (17%), Spain's (10%), and France's (3%)', according to the US Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration's website.⁸⁰ This imperialist shepherding of Tunisia's 2015 security conjuncture in a way that required increased spending, privatization and externalization of security concerns has rendered the country more susceptible to external pressure, thereby undermining its sovereignty.

Racialized Financialization: Counterterror as Global South Wealth Drain

Imperialist financial intervention comprises another more subtle prong of the 2015 security conjuncture and the modes of accumulation and reinforced racialized hierarchies it has enabled. As with other aspects of the war on terror, financial oversight often is presented as a neutral exercise. However, the interests behind these interventions were laid bare in a 2008 Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare document that Wikileaks revealed.⁸¹ The document lists 'The Treasury's Office of International Affairs and Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence (TFI) (and its components)' as a key weapon in US 'economic warfare', providing

⁷⁶ Markus Kienscherf (2019) Race, class and persistent coloniality: US policing as liberal pacification, *Capital & Class* 43(3), pp. 417–436.

⁷⁷ U.S. State Department (2019) Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership.

⁷⁸ Reuters (2021) Tunisia's outstanding public debt climbs to 102 bln dinars - finance ministry, In: *Reuters* (December 21). Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisias-outstanding-public-debt-climbs-102-bln-dinars-finance-ministry-2021-12->, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁷⁹ Rocío Zambrana (2021) *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press).

⁸⁰ Department of Commerce (2021) Tunisia- Country Commercial Guide. Available at: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/tunisia-safety-and-security>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁸¹ US Army Field Manual (2008) US Army Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare. Available at: <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm3-05-130.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2022.

‘financially mission-focused channels for identifying opportunities to employ the financial weapon’. Forms of economic warfare identified in the document include asset freezing, ‘state manipulation of tax and interest rates and other legal and bureaucratic measures’ as well as ‘persuasive influence to international and domestic financial institutions regarding availability and terms of loans, grants, or other financial assistance to foreign state and nonstate actors’.⁸²

The Financial Action Task Force’s Anti-Money Laundering and Counterterrorist Financing Regime (FATF) has been at the heart of the WoT’s financial operations. Draped in technical language, the FATF enables greater surveillance of and therefore leverage over global South economies by IFIs. Tellingly, the 2016 evaluation of Tunisia’s compliance with this regime was conducted by the WB. The country was placed on a ‘grey list’ of countries found to ‘have strategic deficiencies in combating money laundering and terrorist financing’.⁸³

The EU also has made use of the counterterror ‘financial weapon’, and placed Tunisia on the European Commission’s ‘blacklist’ of 23 countries with ‘strategic shortcomings in their anti-money laundering and terrorist financing frameworks’. Patrice Bergamini, the EU Ambassador to Tunisia, claimed the objective of this placing was ‘to enable Tunisia to fulfil its commitments to the FATF as soon as possible’.⁸⁴ However, Tunisia’s then Former Finance Minister, Houcine Dimassi, rejected this justification in a moment of unusual candour, arguing that the EC was pressuring Tunisia to sign the DCFTA by keeping Tunisia on the blacklist.⁸⁵ As Hamouchene and Riahi have argued, the DCFTA ultimately is designed ‘to insert the most profitable companies on Tunisian soil into the European free market and to condition the Tunisian market to supply the EU’, thereby deepening unequal exchange between Tunisia and the EU under the guise of Free Trade.⁸⁶

These evaluations impact on a state’s standing within the various economic ratings and tables that, in turn, set the terms of loan agreements and ability to engage in other economic activities. For global South states structurally dependent on loans from IFIs, any change in their ratings could have deep and lasting economic ramifications. The kinds of knowledge produced by these indices and rankings are, of course, far from objective. Even though money laundering and complex entanglements of ‘licit’ and ‘illicit’ capital can be found at all levels of global capitalist transaction, global South states consistently and almost exclusively are singled out by the powerful rating agencies. This suggests the existence of an imperialist knowledge production around credit. Through reference to neo-colonial ‘imaginaries and representations’ of disfunction, they elide the West’s role in producing and maintaining global South ‘delinquency’ and are crucial to the (re)production of the global color line, with terrorism at the top of the list of these factors used to justify global North intervention.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Riahi and Hamouchene, Deep and comprehensive dependency.

⁸⁴ Euromesco (2019) EU’s Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing blacklist: Saudi Arabia added, Tunisia remains (February 13). Available at: <https://www.euromesco.net/news/eus-money-laundering-and-terrorism-financing-blacklist-saudi-arabia-added-tunisia-remains/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Riahi and Hamouchene, Deep and comprehensive dependency.

⁸⁷ Ilias Alami (2018) On the terrorism of money in emerging capitalism economies, in: *Progress in Political Economy* (September 10). Available at: <https://www.ppesydney.net/on-the-terrorism-of-money-in-emerging-capitalist-economies/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

Another often overlooked aspect of a country's decline on these indices is the impact they have on currency devaluation, contributing to higher borrowing costs and intensified risks of debt distress. In Tunisia, the depreciation of the dinar was well underway even before the 2015 security conjuncture due to the IMF's 'sustained pressure' on the country's newly 'independent'—meaning: privatized—Central Bank to refrain from intervening in the currency markets, thus protecting the value of the Tunisian dinar. This imposed devaluation was compounded by the 'security crisis', leading to even greater levels of currency instability. In 2018 alone, the impact of Tunisia's devaluation contributed 9.5 billion dinars to Tunisia's public debt.⁸⁸ On a global-structural level, Ilias Alami explains that 'currency instability in developing countries' is one of the principal means through which 'currency stability in advanced capitalist countries' is maintained. In other words, it 'is a key manifestation of contemporary imperialism, and it entails a highly uneven spatial distribution of financial vulnerability and deflationary adjustment'.⁸⁹ These lists not only reinforce ontological hierarchy as they 'perpetuat[e] an age-old imperial myth that colonial and postcolonial subjects are deficient and need intense monitoring and discipline to correct their corrupt tendencies', but also facilitate the global South wealth drain required to materially sustain this hierarchy.⁹⁰

Conclusion: Resisting the Imperialist Security State

Employing a conjunctural approach, this article has argued that the 2015 security crisis paved the way for the further integration of Tunisia within a US-led imperialist security architecture through legal interventions, border violence, peripheral militarization, increased 'security' spending, debt and racialized financialization. In doing so, it contributed to deepening stratified vulnerabilities, peasant dispossession and proletarianization, wage deflation and increased labor exploitation, ultimately reinforcing Tunisia's peripheral status and economic dependency on the imperialist core. Given that these processes entail the application of extra-economic violence and capitalist expansion, I have argued that they can be considered a form of primitive accumulation. Yet, just as this conjuncture enabled new forms of exploitation, dispossession and subjugation, it also created new opportunities for resistance.

The security conjuncture—a moment of amplified and heightened visibility—provides popular movements with an opportunity to expose and challenge the security state's central contradictions. Unsurprisingly, Tunisia's most fervent post-revolt social mobilizations took place around the same time that the security state was doubling down with its imperial-sponsored counterterror agenda. Although resistance has not always been explicit in its targeting of the security state, that it often has focused on what Manu Karuka describes as the 'infrastructures of logistics and circulation' is quite revealing. It demonstrates people's concern with the kinds of colonial/imperial

⁸⁸ Tunisian Observatory of the Economy (2021) FMI: Impact of Tunisia's Currency Devaluation. *TOE Briefing Paper* (August 20). Available at: <https://www.economie-tunisie.org/en/observatory/fmi-impact-tunisia%E2%80%99s-currency-devaluation>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁸⁹ Ilias Alami (2019) Global Finance Capital and Third World Debt, in: Ness, I., Cope, Z. (eds) *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 15.

⁹⁰ Joaquín Villanueva (2019) Corruption Narratives and Colonial Technologies in Puerto Rico, *NACLA Report on the Americas* 51(2), pp. 188–193.

extraction and unequal geographies of accumulation that the imperially imbricated security state is designed to protect.⁹¹ Karuka argues that, in the context of US settler colonialism, the targeting of extractivist infrastructure by Indigenous movements, as it occurred with the DAPL pipeline struggle, can be seen as a means of ‘arrest[ing] the liquidity, and hence the value, of finance capital’.⁹² From the perspective of labor, the targeting of ‘choke points’, or ‘points of extraction, processing, or transportation’, can disrupt global commodity chains and either ‘win benefits’ for workers ‘or force reconfiguration of those production networks’.⁹³ Similarly, in the Tunisian context, some of the most radical challenges to the security state, and the neocolonial-capitalist interests on whose behalf it functions, have come in the form of protests led by dispossessed workers in the extractive industries.

Despite the inclusion of article 13 in Tunisia’s post-revolt 2014 constitution (carried over to the 2022 constitution with some modifications), which stipulates state as well as popular sovereignty over the country’s natural resources, foreign oil and gas companies continue to exploit, ecologically degrade and drain surplus value from the country with little oversight. As in colonial times, many Tunisians do not see the benefits of this spatially unbalanced extractive regime that has resulted in the poorest parts of the country (interior, south, and border regions) providing the means to accumulate wealth elsewhere (in large part in foreign—largely Western—countries as well as in Tunisia’s historically wealthier capital and Sahel/coastal region). In this sense, extractive (and military) zones, such as the Gafsa phosphate mining basin and the oil producing regions of Tataouine, are central to understanding the relationship of the security state to the extraction and transfer of Tunisia’s natural resources and surplus value. They have been at the core of what can be described as the region’s ‘underdevelopment’, in the words of Walter Rodney, the racialized and spatialized ‘depriv[ation] of societies of the benefit of their natural resources and labour’⁹⁴ and have contributed to (re)producing the geographical, gender and class inequalities underpinning Tunisia’s (neo)colonial-capitalist mode of development. As in the past, neocolonial and racialized forms of exploitation and accumulation continue to be resisted by the communities most affected.

Between March and June 2017, a sit-in got underway in the town of El Kemour, located in Tunisia’s marginalized, southernmost border region of Tataouine, and became part of the broader ‘struggles of the poor’ that ‘so disproportionately pock the peripheries of Tunisia’.⁹⁵ Initially, demands were limited to increased community investment by the gas and oil companies, as well as improved employment opportunities. However, the movement’s claims became more expansive in the face of state violence. Elements of the El Kamour social movement began demanding nationalization of the country’s natural resources and a redistribution of the wealth accumulated through its exploitation. As Ajl explains, these demands amount to a call ‘for changing the flows, institutions, and exclusions of Tunisia’s accumulation model’.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Karuka, *Empires Tracks*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁹³ Sowers, Ciccantell and Smith, p. 79.

⁹⁴ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, p. 25.

⁹⁵ Max Ajl (2019) *Development by Popular Protection and Tunisia: The Case of Tataouine, Globalizations* 16(7), pp. 1215–1231.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Reflecting the unequal geographies of Tunisia's stratified national security state, El Kamour, the site of several foreign-owned oil and natural gas extraction sites, including Italy's ENI SpA, Austria's OMV AG and France's Perenco, is a declared military zone. This means that the military were the first security apparatus to intervene in the oil protests. Unhappy with the military's failure to employ a sufficient level of violence to protect the extraction sites from protest blockages, President Beji Caid Essebsi called in the National Guard, which is under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry. Deploying a colonially derived state of emergency discourse, the government attempted to delegitimize the leaders of the protest by linking them to terrorism. When a police officer killed a young man, Anouar Sokrafi, at the site of the sit-in on May 22, 2017, some protesters decided to burn down two local police stations as well as forcing the closure of one of the main oil pumping stations.⁹⁷ Following popular outrage at the heavy handed approach of Tunisia's institutions of organized violence, the government entered into negotiations with the protestors and concluded an agreement with the government on June 16, 2017, requiring oil companies operating in Tataouine to hire several thousand people from the region over three years. The government also committed to setting a special development fund of 80 million dinars (\$29 million) that would be allocated annually in order to redress the government's past unequal treatment of this peripheral region. However, the agreement had yet to be implemented several years later.⁹⁸

To protest the lack of progress in implementing the agreement, El Kamour organizers re-established their protest encampment in June 2020. The demonstrations were largely peaceful until the arrest of the movement's spokesperson and the use of tear gas against demonstrators, which 'generated increased local sympathy for the protests, with more people joining the rallies'.⁹⁹ Due to the declared military zone, individuals arrested, including leading members of the El Kamour Coordination committee accused of throwing Molotov cocktails and stones at the military barracks in Remada, were tried in a military tribunal and sentenced from one and five years in jail. El Kamour protestors have pointed to the irony that no progress has been made in identifying and prosecuting the National Guard officer who killed Sokrafi in 2017.¹⁰⁰

These struggles momentarily were muted with the outbreak of COVID in 2020. The global health pandemic combined with the 2022- ongoing US/NATO proxy war in Ukraine provides the context for the current security conjuncture. Due to Tunisia's food and energy dependency, a feature of its peripheral location in the world system, the impact of both crises on global value chains and food systems have had a profound impact on the Tunisian economy. Most importantly, it has led to burgeoning levels of inflation and unemployment, as well as significant GDP contraction (8.8 percent in

⁹⁷ Coordination of the Kamour Sit-in (2017). Al-Rajā' min shabāb Tatāwīn [Urgent request from the Tataouine youth], Facebook (May 22). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/elkamour/posts/1681627422139552> [Google Scholar], accessed January 15, 2022.

⁹⁸ Hamza Meddeb (2021) Life on the Edge: How Protests in Tataouine Forced Tunis to Back Down, in: *Carnegie Middle East Center* (February 1). Available at: <https://carnegie-mec.org/2021/02/01/life-on-edge-how-protests-in-tataouine-forced-tunis-to-back-down-pub-83768>, accessed January 15, 2022.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Alikhbariaattounsia (2022) hakdā 'alaq 'uḍū tansīqīyya' al-kāmūr 'ala aḥkām al-maḥkamah al' askarīyya [This is how a member of the Al Kamour Coordination commented on the rulings of the military court], in: *Alikhbariaattounsia* [Tunisian news] (January 11) 2022. Available at: <https://www.alikhbariaattounsia.com/ar/article/39675/>, accessed January 15, 2022.

2020 alone), increased budget deficit, currency devaluation.¹⁰¹ Combined, this has resulted in the country's downgrading by neocolonial credit ratings agencies leading to higher borrowing costs and greater levels of public debt, which currently stands at 82.6 percent of Tunisia's GDP.¹⁰² Although it fared better than many countries in the early stages of the pandemic due to a stringent lockdown, by July 2021 Tunisia had reported more deaths than any African country and was among the highest daily death rates per capita in the world. Combined, these crises led to the further immiseration of Tunisia's popular classes, continuing to undermine workers' and peasants' capacity for social reproduction and further developing conditions for super-exploitation.

This political-economic context created objective conditions ripe for popular dissent. A new wave of contestation broke out in January 2021, coinciding with the anniversary of the 2010–2011 revolt. Protests erupted on January 15 after a video posted on Facebook showing a police officer gratuitously humiliating a shepherd in the northwestern governorate of Siliana in the central region of Kasserine, then Sidi Bouzid, quickly spreading to Bizerte, Tebourba, and Sousse, as well as working class Tunis neighborhoods. The protest movement intensified in the aftermath of the police killing of a young man in Sbeitla, Kasserine, near the militarized Algerian border, who died after being struck on the head by a police teargas canister.¹⁰³ As part of the popular mobilization, The National Campaign to Support the Social Struggles, issued a statement reflecting the connections being made by the social movement between the police state and the deteriorating social conditions of the popular classes.¹⁰⁴ The statement demanded an end to state repression of the protest and the release of all prisoners in addition to calling for rights to health care, increase in minimum wages, a fixed unemployment allowance for every unemployed person as well as debt relief for all working-class people in the face of the pandemic. Just as movement among the popular classes has remained consistent, including protests in Agareb, Sfax against the government's failure to protect the population from a toxic landfill, and in Zarzis, against the government's complicity in the violent externalization and militarization of Europe's racist borders, so too has police repression.¹⁰⁵

The movement against police violence coalesced around the case of a 19-year-old working-class football fan Omar Laabidi, who was killed by police near the Rades Olympic Stadium in Tunis following a match on March 31, 2018, when clashes erupted between police and sports' clubs fans. Omar Laabidi had tried to escape from the riot police who

¹⁰¹ Nada Trigui et Ameni Ben Sik Ali (2022) al-trīq īl al-tdāin: rṣd rhlf mfaūdat tūns amlklbf bāldtūn m' ṣndūq al-nqd al-dwyl [Wrestling for debt: Monitoring the loan negotiations with Tunisia in a highly indebted Tunisia], in: *OTE*. Available at: https://www.economie-tunisie.org/sites/default/files/imf_monitor_arabic.pdf, accessed December 19, 2022.

¹⁰² Reuters (2022) Factbox: Signs of a Tunisian economy in trouble, *Reuters* (July 24). Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/signs-tunisian-economy-trouble-2022-07-24/>, accessed December 19, 2022.

¹⁰³ Emna Mornagui and Shaden Ghannam (2022) al-ḥmlf al-ūtnf līsnād al-nḍālāt al-īḡtmā'īwī [Number of deaths caused by police violence since 2011], in: *Inkyfada*. Available at: <https://inkyfada.com/ar/webdoc>, accessed December 19, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ The National Campaign to Support the Social Struggles (2021) al-ḥmlf al-ūtnf līsnād al-nḍālāt al-īḡtmā'īwī bīān [The National Campaign to Support The Social Struggles Statement]. *Facebook* (25 January). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/page/1785638271760813/>, accessed December 20, 2022.

¹⁰⁵ FTDES (2022) Civil society rejects police approaches in dealing with popular protests, In: *Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux* [Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights] (October 10). Available at: <https://ftdes.net/en/la-societe-civile-rejette-les-approches-policieres-face-aux-manifestations/>, accessed December 19, 2022.

were shooting tear gas at the fans and eventually found himself at a dead end, stuck between the stadium and 'Oued Meliane' river. Witnesses say police forced him to jump in as they blocked all exit routes surrounding the stadium. When Laabidi told police he couldn't swim, they reportedly told him *ta'alem oum*, or 'learn to swim', – a phrase that has since become a mantra of the movement against police violence.¹⁰⁶ Although the case dates back to 2018, mobilization has continued in the aftermath of an unsatisfactory court decision on November 3, 2022 in which the 12 responsible officers were sentenced to only two years in prison on charges of manslaughter.¹⁰⁷

Many western media analysts and scholars have pointed to Laabidi's case as an example of police impunity under Kaïs Saïed, who was elected president in October 2019, despite the killing occurring before his time in office. They include this in the list of charges ostensibly demonstrating the president's 'creeping authoritarianism', including the dissolution of parliament and dismissal of the prime minister along with Saïed's promulgation of a new constitution and shift from parliamentary back to presidential system – although the president and his supporters (many of whom are from the popular classes) insist these are necessary changes to enact meaningful political and economic reform and empower local politics.

Dominant western media, policy and academic accounts of Tunisia's current conjuncture continue to downplay the role of imperialist IFIs in imposing 'reforms' designed to undermine working class power, including the reduction of energy and food subsidies, and the freezing of public wages, bonuses and new public sector hirings.¹⁰⁸ As Nada Trigui and Ameni Ben Sik Ali highlight, peripheral states like Tunisia have very little 'power leverage in negotiations' with these institutions. Dominant narratives instead tend to individualize what are essentially systemic issues, overlooking questions of class and Tunisia's structural location in the world system. Such framings have their roots in the orientalist and colonial 'white man's burden' tradition, designed to reinforce a racialized and hierarchal ontological global ordering. As Matteo Capasso has argued, reductionist analyses that center around the 'figure of one man and present crises as 'localized processes delinked from the imperialist interstate system' effectively serve to reinforce that very system.¹⁰⁹

As with past security conjunctures, it is possible that this latest one further will integrate Tunisia's security state within the US-led imperialist security architecture, providing new opportunities for extraction and imperialist core capital accumulation. However, the current conjuncture also holds within it the potential for revolutionary transformation. Tunisian history is replete with examples of resistance to the imperially imbricated security state and the numerous forms of extraction, exploitation, and accumulation that it is designed to enable and protect. The most recent examples of working-class movements from El Kamour to Siliana, Zarzis, Tunis and Kasserine

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Fethi Belaid (2022) "Tunisia: in the Omar Laabidi case, the verdict against the police is controversial, in: *AFP* (November 4). Available at: <https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2022-11-04-tunisia-in-the-omar-laabidi-case-the-verdict-against-the-police-is-controversial.B11O1GMBs.html>, accessed December 19, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Nada Trigui et Ameni Ben Sik Ali (2022) *al-trīq il al-tdāin: rṣd rhlf mfaūḍāt tūns amlkbīf bāldūn m' ṣndūq al-nqd al-dwyl* [Wrestling for debt: Monitoring the loan negotiations with Tunisia in a highly indebted Tunisia]

¹⁰⁹ Matteo Capasso (2021). *IR, Imperialism, and the Global South: From Libya to Venezuela, Politics*, 0(0).

demonstrate the strong will of the Tunisian people to continue to imagine and struggle toward an alternative to the colonial-capitalist model of development that is predicated on profound inequality and which has required the forfeiting of Tunisia's sovereignty from its inception.

With increased attention on resisting the institutions of organized violence, these popular struggles recognize that the imperialist imbricated security state is an obstacle to achieving wealth redistribution and working class liberation. However, the current conjuncture may also prove the inverse to be true: that the repressive security apparatuses can only be radically transformed once the state is no longer oriented toward surplus value drain and transfer. In this sense, when combined with working class organization and mobilization, the rise of a multipolar order world may do more than any western liberal platitudes about human rights and 'security' sector reform to reorient the security state. By providing a real material basis for Tunisia to delink from the capitalist core, such global transformations might allow Tunisia to break from the racist and exploitative political-economic system that requires the state to use violence to repress and discipline the popular classes for the benefit of global north capital.

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