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Work, Freedom, Dignity

For Young Tunisians, the Revolution Was Not Only About
Accountability for Corruption

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Wait, don't be fooled by the spring, the clearness of the sky or the light of dawn, For on the horizon lies the horror of darkness, rumble of thunder, and blowing of winds. Beware, for below the ash there is fire, and he who grows thorns reaps wounds.

—Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi, Tunisian poet (1909–1934), in “To the Tyrants of the World”¹

How Corruption and Repression Can Reinforce Impunity

On the evening of May 17, 2017, ordinary Tunisians heard for the first time a Ben Ali family member admit to how the family had committed large-scale corruption crimes during Ben Ali’s 24-year dictatorship—and then apologize for his role in it. Imed Trabelsi, said to be the dictator’s favorite nephew, was the first witness presented by Tunisia’s Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC)—known in French as the Instance Vérité et Dignité, or IVD—at its public hearing on corruption.² Broadcast on television and live-streamed on social media, the hearing represented a pivotal moment for Tunisia and for transitional justice. It demonstrated how a truth commission might help a society emerging from authoritarianism understand how a corrupt and ruthless dictatorship could rule for as long it did—and who should be held responsible for its abuses.

In the TDC’s final report, the 206-page chapter on corruption examines how Ben Ali and his family profited from their control over key sectors of the economy, particularly the country’s tourism industry, banking and finance, and extraction of natural resources.³ The TDC found that Ben Ali “captured” the state’s regulatory power in such areas as customs enforcement (which was what Imed Trabelsi discussed extensively at the public hearing) and the privatization of state enterprises. According to the World Bank—whose own role in enabling corruption during the dictatorship was brought up by activists, and is discussed by some of them in this paper—Ben Ali “used existing regulations and created new ones to benefit family members and those close to the regime...to such an extent that this

1 “Tunisian Poet’s Verses Inspire Arab Protesters,” *All Things Considered*, January 30, 2011, www.npr.org/2011/01/30/133354601/Tunisian-Poets-Verses-Inspire-Arab-Protesters

2 “10ème Audition Publique Sur La Corruption,” Dec. 22, 2017, www.ivd.tn/timeline/10eme-audition-publique-sur-la-corruption/?lang=fr

3 TDC Final Report, Book III, “Financial Corruption and Abuses on Public Money,” December 2018.

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About the Author

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group of privileged insiders was capturing over 21 percent of all private sector profits in the country.⁴

How was it possible for the dictatorship to freely engage in such extensive corruption? The explanation lies in what one of this paper's authors has characterized as "mutually reinforcing impunity."⁵ Authoritarian leaders can commit corruption with impunity because they can commit human rights violations with impunity—and vice versa. The Ben Ali dictatorship murdered critics and activists; instigated the arrest, prolonged detention, torture, and sexual abuse of secular and Islamist opponents; and inflicted less physically violent but just as harsh social, economic, civil, and political rights violations on thousands of Tunisians. Yet, institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank praised Ben Ali as a modernizing leader because he implemented their economic prescriptions, and Western governments supported him because he was their ally in counterterrorism.⁶ Transparency International, on the eve of the revolution in 2010, even "underestimated" corruption in Tunisia and did not characterize Ben Ali as the corrupt dictator he was.⁷ A 2008 report by the Committee to Project Journalists described Ben Ali's government more accurately: "Tunisia wants you to believe it is a progressive nation that protects human rights. It is, in fact, a police state that aggressively silences anyone who challenges President Ben Ali."⁸

Abuses involving physical integrity, civil rights, and political rights, inflicted upon those citizens who openly resisted Ben Ali, were certainly among the human rights violations that fueled the Tunisian revolution. But the violation that most young Tunisians personally felt and fully understood was the one that compelled unemployed 26-year-old fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi to set himself on fire: the violation "of the right to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."⁹

Tunisians equated this human rights violation with a violation of dignity, a concept better represented in Arabic by the word *karama*.¹⁰ (This is why the Tunisia truth commission is called the Truth and *Dignity* Commission.) For Tunisian young people who became the driving force of the revolution, finding employment meant having dignity, and having dignity called for ending the corruption that took away their chance to make a living.

4 "New World Bank Study Details Manipulation of Regulations by Former Tunisian Regime Officials" [press release], World Bank, March 27, 2014.

5 Ruben Carranza, "Plunder and Pain: Should Transitional Justice Engage with Corruption and Economic Crimes?" *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 2 (2008): 310–330.

6 Karen Pfeifer, "How Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Even Egypt Became IMF 'Success Stories' in the 1990s," Middle East Report, no. 210, *Reform or Reaction? Dilemmas of Economic Development in the Middle East* (Spring 1999): 23–27.

7 Hannes Baumann, "A Failure of Governmentality: Why Transparency International Underestimated Corruption in Ben Ali's Tunisia," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2017): 467–482.

8 Committee to Protect Journalists, "Tunisia Report: The Smiling Oppressor," 2008.

9 UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, United Nations Treaty Series 993 (December 16, 1966), 3, www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c.html

10 On the eve of the revolution in 2010, overall youth unemployment was at 30 percent. It rose to 42 percent the following year, in the uncertainty of post-dictatorship conditions. Among unemployed young people, there were more reasons for resentment: 47 percent of young university graduates were unemployed. Youth unemployment in the country's noncoastal interior regions—the marginalized communities that can seek reparations from the state under Tunisia's 2013 transitional justice law—was higher, at 32 percent, than in coastal regions (22 percent) or the capital (23 percent). Mohamed Siala and Nehed Ben Ammar, "Tunisia's Revolution and Youth Unemployment," *Eurasian Journal of Economics and Finance* 1, no. 2 (2013): 39–50, [http://www.eurasianpublications.com/pdf/ejocaf/3\)%20Tunisia%20Revolution%20and%20Youth%20Unemployment%20\(39-50\).pdf](http://www.eurasianpublications.com/pdf/ejocaf/3)%20Tunisia%20Revolution%20and%20Youth%20Unemployment%20(39-50).pdf)

One of the revolution's main slogans expresses this clearly: "Employ us or kill us."¹¹ While the revolution ended the dictatorship, for the young, unemployed Tunisians who made it happen, the revolution was only the beginning.

Goals, Audience, and Methodology for This Paper

Building on ICTJ's involvement since 2012 in transitional justice processes in Tunisia organized by both the state and civil society, ICTJ identified youth-led civil society organizations, social movements, state institutions, and policymakers involved in pursuing accountability for Ben Ali-era corruption whom ICTJ could convene or interview. ICTJ drew up a set of questions for interviews, covering the motivations of young anti-corruption activists, the challenges faced by anti-corruption institutions in dealing with Ben Ali-era corruption, and how the members of these different groups see the relationship between transitional justice and the anti-corruption work they do. ICTJ also selected emblematic corruption-related cases or issues from both the dictatorship and post-dictatorship periods as the context for those discussions, and designed a series of workshops in which participants and resource persons could present, ask about, or explain the strategies they used and the challenges they face.

This paper summarizes those discussions and interviews. It is not meant to be an exhaustive report on the link between responsibility for corruption and transitional justice in Tunisia. Its focus is on the strategies and insights of youth-led Tunisian civil society organizations and social movements that are pursuing accountability for dictatorship-era corruption. It seeks to call attention to the larger revolutionary goals of many of these youth-led movements, and to guide and inform the work of Tunisian and international transitional justice policymakers, advocates, and donors in ways that might support the needs of young Tunisian activists across the country's ideological spectrum.

ICTJ organized three workshops (on May 4, June 15, and July 10, 2019) with three complementary themes:

- "How Youth Understand Anti-Corruption Work in a Transitional Justice Process—Introductory Workshop"
- "Youth and Anti-Corruption Efforts as a Tool to Accountability in a Transitional Justice Process"
- "Open Discussion on Youth and Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Transitional Justice Process of Tunisia"

ICTJ invited 83 participants drawn from or representing youth-led civil society groups and social movements. The discussions were held in Tunis and included representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as international nongovernmental organizations such as DCAF and Impunity Watch. ICTJ invited representatives of state institutions leading anti-corruption work in Tunisia to speak at these discussions. These institutions include the Instance Nationale de Lutte contre la Corruption (or National Anti-Corruption Commission); the Chargé Général de Contentieux de l'Etat (or State

11 Jillian Kestler-D'Amours, "Employ Us or Kill Us': Tunisian Youth on the Margins," *Al Jazeera*, Jan. 16, 2018, www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/kill-tunisian-youth-margins-180116180238426.html

Litigation Agency); and the Pole Judiciaire, économique et financier (or Judicial, Economic, and Financial Pole). On July 10, 2019, ICTJ conducted the third and last workshop in Tunis, which brought together many of the young activists and representatives of state institutions who participated in interviews and earlier workshops. The discussion led to a broader exchange about the dictatorship’s development policies and how those policies enabled corruption, led to marginalization, and reinforced impunity for human rights violations.¹²

The three youth and anti-corruption workshops were followed by a series of 12 interviews that ICTJ conducted in Tunis, Redeyef, Gafsa, Mahdida, Kerkenah, and Sfax with representatives from youth-led civil society groups and social movements, including:

- The Union générale des étudiants de Tunisie (UGET) and the Union générale Tunisienne des étudiants (UGTE), both student unions
- Petrofac sit-in activists
- I Watch, the Tunisian chapter of Transparency International
- The “Manich Msamah” (“I Will Not Forgive”) movement
- The “Ma Galoulnech” (“They Didn’t Tell Us”) movement
- The “Group of 25” lawyers’ movement
- The Tunisian Organization of Young Doctors and “Expose Your Hospital” movement
- The “Leave the Sidewalk” movement
- The Tunisian Economic Observatory
- The Union of Unemployed Graduates

The Range of Youth-led Anti-corruption Advocacy Efforts

Most Tunisian young people understand “corruption” as specific day-to-day misconduct by public officials, with bribery being the most common example. As pointed out during the first two workshops, this basic definition contrasts with the more sophisticated conception that is held among youth-led anti-corruption groups. They speak of corruption as an “ecosystem” or “network” involving abuse of power and having cultural roots. Achref Aouadi, president of I Watch, the Tunisia chapter of Transparency International, expressed apprehension that while corruption “is a tool in the hands of the dominant class,” it has seeped “deeper and deeper into the behavior and culture of our people and now affects every aspect of life.”¹³

Some young leaders focused on the legal definition and criminal character of corruption under Tunisian law.¹⁴ Others spoke of corruption as a breaking of a social code. Some young activists also viewed silence and indifference as “covering up corrupt behavior.”¹⁵

¹² ICTJ, “An Unfinished Revolution: Tackling Corruption in Tunisia,” July 25, 2019.

¹³ ICTJ interview with Achref Aouadi, July 15, 2019, in Tunis. Aouadi is a civil society activist in his early 30s and the president of I Watch organization.

¹⁴ Organic Law no. 2017-10 of March 7, 2017, relating to the “Reporting on Corruption and the Protection of Whistleblowers.”

¹⁵ ICTJ interview with Achref Aouadi.

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Within I Watch, activists have varying ideological and nonideological motivations for pursuing accountability for corruption. I Watch member Intissar Arfaoui spoke of the “ultimate joy when we win cases, even the smallest one, like those relating to the right to access information.”¹⁶ Mouheb Garoui described his involvement in I Watch as part of “the ultimate cause of social justice: that every person has the right to have a good education, to convenient public transportation, and to a health system that respects human dignity.”¹⁷

“It is my patriotic duty to defend this land. It’s painful to see the situation we are living in. Our resources are stolen from private investors and, as you see, we’re being affected by pollution, lack of water, and insecure jobs.”

For some young activists outside of I Watch, the ideological motivations are clearer and the link to the 2011 revolution is more direct. Ali Souilhi, an activist from the Gafsa mining basin area, connects his anti-corruption involvement to the 2008 killings of Gafsa residents who protested corruption in the company’s employment practices, as well as to the community’s history of protesting the health and environmental harms caused by phosphate mining. Like many Tunisian activists,¹⁸ Souilhi regards the 2008 protests as the real beginning of the revolution. He explained, “It is my patriotic duty to defend this land. It’s painful to see the situation we are living in. Our resources are stolen from private investors and, as you see, we’re being affected by pollution, lack of water, and insecure jobs.”¹⁹

For Charfeddine Kellil, a lawyer who co-founded the “Group of 25” (a group of Tunisian lawyers who advocated “revolutionary transitional justice” in the immediate period of the Arab Spring),²⁰ filing corruption cases is a way of “going as far as [we] can in changing the system.”²¹ Jed Henchiri, of the movement called Balance ton Hôpital (whose campaigns are discussed further below), expressed this same need for changing the system, not only because it is corrupt but also because it is fundamentally unequal: “If somebody takes more than they need, then automatically that’s taken from other persons in need. This is exactly what we’re living now—a minority enjoying all resources and a majority that is suffering.”²²

By linking culpability for corruption to “changing the system” and to correcting social inequality, some activists go beyond relying on the legal standards that other anti-corruption advocates use and view accountability as involving more than simply holding Ben Ali and his relatives, officials, and cronies responsible for their actions. As Leila Riahi put it at

16 ICTJ interview with Intissar Arfaoui, July 16, 2019, in Tunis. Arfaoui is a paralegal in her early 30s, a civil society activist, and a former senior legal adviser in I Watch.

17 ICTJ interview with Mouheb Garoui, July 21, 2019, in Tunis. Garoui is a co-founder and former executive director of I Watch.

18 Carlotta Gall, “Tunisian Discontent Reflected in Protests That Have Idled Mines,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/05/14/world/africa/tunisian-discontent-reflected-in-protests-that-have-idled-mines.html

19 ICTJ interview with Ali Souilhi, Aug. 15, 2019, in Redeyef-Gafsa. Souilhi is an executive in the Compagnie des phosphates de Gafsa and a local social activist in Redeyef.

20 ICTJ, “Trials in Tunisia and Egypt: Can Transitional Justice Work in Unfinished Revolutions?,” 2011.

21 ICTJ interview with Charfeddine Kellil, Sept. 7, 2019, in Mahdia. Kellil is a lawyer and a co-founder of the “Group of 25.” He defended the rights of the martyrs and wounded of the revolution and stood with Manich Msamah against the 2015 reconciliation law project.

22 ICTJ interview with Jed Henchiri, July 31, 2019, in Tunis. Henchiri is a medical doctor in his early 30s; a co-founder of the Tunisian Organization for Young Doctors, which led the protests of the medical students following the 2015 reform; and a member of the “Expose Your Hospital” movement.

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the third workshop, this frames anti-corruption activism beyond slogans of “good governance.” Not only are phrases like “good governance” or even “transparency” too broad, she explained, but Ben Ali himself used the “good governance” slogan to please institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. Riahi asserted:

Accountability for the ex-dictator’s corruption isn’t enough. Ben Ali is gone. The rest of the oligarchy and his economic policies remain. The system that enabled corruption in Tunisia cannot be dismantled without addressing the social and economic injustices that led to poverty and marginalization. We must learn that lesson so that our next revolution can correct it.

State-led Transitional Justice Responses

The decisive role that Tunisian young people played during the revolution has frequently been acknowledged. The post-dictatorship Tunisian constitution refers to “youth as a force in nation-building” and commits the state to “provide the necessary conditions for developing the capacities of youth and realizing their potential.”²³ Yet, this role for young people has not been accorded a proportionate weight in anti-corruption and transitional justice policymaking. At best, the state’s record of directly involving young Tunisians in its activities is mixed. For example, the 2013 transitional justice law required the TDC

to include at least four lawyers, one medical doctor, and several other specialists as commissioners. But the law did not require a single commissioner representing young Tunisians.²⁴ In fact, the law set a minimum age of 30 for a person to qualify as a commissioner, effectively excluding many Tunisians who took part in the revolution.

Early post-dictatorship state responses were more sensitive to the demands and role of young activists. The first truth-seeking bodies formed after the revolution were a commission of inquiry on corruption under Ben Ali²⁵ and a commission of inquiry on human rights violations committed during the revolution.²⁶ A few younger civil society activists were appointed to these bodies, and there was an effort to consider the role

young activists had played in the revolution, particularly as victims of violence committed by the state. In the words of Amin Al-Ghali from the Al-Kawakibi Democracy Transition Center, these early decisions to create truth-seeking bodies were “the first step toward abandoning the official and classical state infrastructure.”²⁷ The law creating a subsequent anti-corruption commission, the INLUCC, could have expanded the involvement of young people. It calls for up to 30 commissioners, including seven from civil society. Yet, the law did not require youth representation on the commission.²⁸

“If somebody takes more than they need, then automatically that’s taken from other persons in need. This is exactly what we’re living now—a minority enjoying all resources and a majority that is suffering.”

23 Art. 8 of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution.

24 Organic Law no. 53-2013 on “Establishing and Organizing Transitional Justice,” Title II, Part II, Arts. 19, 20, and 21.

25 Decree-Law no. 2011-7 of February 18, 2011, on the “Establishing of the National Investigation Commission on Corruption” under Ben Ali.

26 Decree-Law no. 2011-8 of February 18, 2011, on the “Establishment of the National Investigation Commission on Human Rights Violations During the 2010-2011 Revolution.”

27 Amin Al-Ghali, “The Journey of Transitional Justice in Tunisia: From Civil Movement to Legislation,” in *The Constitution of Tunisia* (UNDP, 2016), 369–379, www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/the-constitution-of-tunisie-.html

28 Republic of Tunisia, Framework Decree no. 120 of 2011, relating to the fight against corruption, www.legislation.tn/detailtexte/D%C3%A9cret-loi-num-2011-120-du-14-11-2011-jort-2011-088_2011088001202

The state's initial responses significantly reflected the urgency and revolutionary demands of young activists. After the creation of the first commissions of inquiry, the state imposed a travel ban on 112 Ben Ali family members and business associates and froze their assets.²⁹ Later, however, the state's approach became more institutional, increasingly relying on law and bureaucracy rather than being driven by social movements and their activism. A Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice was created in 2012.³⁰ A transitional justice law was enacted in 2013. These institutional state responses were slow and often dysfunctional, but they were not consciously counterrevolutionary.

Of the cases investigated by the first anti-corruption commission of inquiry and referred for criminal prosecution, only 10 percent were formally investigated.³¹ The rest were transferred to the INLUCC, where they languished until they were then transferred to the TDC.³² At the end of the TDC's mandate in 2018, it referred only 39 of those corruption cases to the special criminal courts (or Specialized Chambers) that had been created by the transitional justice law. The corruption chapter of the TDC final report largely repeats the findings and conclusions of the original commission of inquiry.³³

The TDC could have capitalized on the mandate to use an arbitration process between self-admitted perpetrators of corruption and the state, in order to come to an agreement on returning ill-gotten assets. But instead of adopting a transparent arbitration process that engaged civil society, the TDC opted for secrecy. It did not leverage the state's coercive and investigative powers, including the existing mutual legal assistance processes shared with countries like Switzerland, to obtain information about fraudulently obtained assets. Instead, it apparently relied principally upon information that was supplied by self-admitted perpetrators of corruption. Understandably, young activists' emerging skepticism about the state-led transitional justice process grew as arbitration continued.

Young Activists' Reactions to Arbitration

Whether in terms of the number of cases that were resolved or the sense that accountability had been established, arbitration did not appear to be a success. According to the TDC final report, of the 4,821 requests for arbitration relating to financial corruption, 20 came from business associates of Ben Ali, 13 arbitration agreements had been signed, and only two decisions were finalized and published. Of these total cases, 685 were submitted for arbitration by the state from its own financial institutions that had been victimized by Ben Ali-era corruption.³⁴

The TDC has blamed other state agencies, particularly the State Litigation Agency (SLA), for this outcome. The SLA represents the state in cases involving state-owned assets in

29 "Tunisia Imposes Travel Ban on Ben Ali Allies," *Reuters*, April 8, 2011, <https://af.reuters.com/article/idAFLD-E7371QU20110408>

30 "ICTJ Signs Cooperation Agreement with Tunisian Ministry of Human Rights and Transitional Justice," Jan. 17, 2013, www.ictj.org/news/ictj-signs-cooperation-agreement-tunisian-ministry-human-rights-and-transitional-justice

31 This is according to Mohamed Ayadi, a judge and former IVD Commissioner, during the Introductory Workshop, May 4, 2019, Tunis.

32 In a meeting with the ICTJ in 2017, the INLUCC chair said he would prioritize current, post-dictatorship corruption investigations over those that the INLUCC inherited from the commission of inquiry; subsequently, the INLUCC transferred these cases to the TDC.

33 TDC Final Report, Book III—"Financial Corruption and Abuses on Public Money," December 2018, 12–18.

34 TDC Final Report, Book V—"Guarantees of Non-Repitition," December 2018, 180–181.

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litigation.³⁵ According to Khaled Krichi, the TDC commissioner who led the arbitration process, “the potential for negotiations between the parties was obstructed,” implying that “the interests of the public authorities [was] subject to political pressure [during arbitration].” The state agencies that were engaged with the arbitration process do not see it this way. The Court of Auditors Special Report that examined the TDC’s activities criticized the way the truth commission handled arbitration.³⁶ As SLA representatives explained during the discussions for this briefing paper, the agency sought to coordinate with the TDC and to provide the commission with information to help it assess the value and justness of the financial settlements being offered by those linked to Ben Ali. The SLA thought that the proposed settlements from these self-admitted perpetrators of corruption were significantly below the value of assets they had acquired through corruption. It also meant that they would get to keep the bulk of alleged ill-gotten wealth. The SLA’s secretary-general and adviser-rapporteur, Maujahed Fridhi, said that the state should have been regarded as the “victim” during these arbitration hearings, and should have been involved in the process at the outset and had a say in the outcomes.

The SLA’s concern is exemplified in the 2016 arbitration decision involving Slim Chiboub, a son-in-law of Ben Ali.³⁷ Through the then minister of state property (which supervises the SLA), the agency objected to the TDC’s arbitration decision: “The total amount of looted property [was] not disclosed [by Chiboub] so that the truth has not been revealed in full.”³⁸ This secrecy compelled I Watch to go to Tunisia’s administrative court, where it successfully obtained an order to have the arbitration decision made public.³⁹ In this case, it was a youth-led challenge, rather than an effort by the state through its anti-corruption institutions, that brought public attention to a nontransparent and inherently problematic approach to accountability. Both the idea of arbitration itself and the way it was implemented by the TDC only reinforced perceptions among young activists that elites from the dictatorship and those sitting on the truth commission were negotiating outcomes that would betray the revolution.

Essebsi and the State’s Attempts at Counterrevolution

Explicitly counterrevolutionary policies were adopted by the government of the late president Beji Caid Essebsi. As modest as earlier anti-corruption steps had been, they were still motivated by demands for accountability. Under Essebsi, the main effort was not so much about openly opposing transitional justice. Instead, the goal was to undermine specific transitional justice measures that were most likely to threaten the Ben Ali–connected elite’s access to their illicit wealth and to defeat any possibility of their imprisonment. In 2015, Essebsi proposed amnesties for Ben Ali dictatorship officials, business colleagues, and bureaucrats who had been implicated in corruption. In return, they would surrender

35 The State Litigation Agency was created in 1962 and given the responsibility to represent the state in all international and national litigation and before arbitration tribunals, according to Law no. 88-13 of March 7, 1988, on “Representation of the State, Public Establishments of Administrative Character and Companies under the State Tutelage before the Courts.”

36 “Auditors Court Report on the Truth and Dignity Commission” (April 2019), 15–17.

37 “Petrofac Tunisie Caught Up in a Big Corruption Scandal,” *I Watch*, Nov. 25, 2016, www.iwatch.tn/ar/article/245

38 “A Case That Hits the Headlines: Reconciliation with Slim Chiboub on the Right Track...,” *The Expert*, May 12, 2016, <http://lexpertjournal.net/fr/2016/05/12/une-affaire-qui-defraie-la-chronique-la-reconciliation-avec-slim-chiboub-sur-la-bonne-voie/>

39 “Exclusive: I Watch Organization Publishes the Text of the Peace Agreement with Slim Chiboub,” *I Watch*, Oct. 4, 2016, www.iwatch.tn/ar/article/15

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a fixed percentage of the value of assets that they would admit as illegally acquired. Essebsi argued that the return of these assets would help the distressed economy. He called this the “economic reconciliation” law.⁴⁰

ICTJ took a public position against the bill, pointing out its fundamental defects and how it was even weaker than the TDC arbitration mechanism that had already generated skepticism:

It gives corrupt ex-Ben Ali regime officials, including those who have also been implicated in political repression, and the businessmen who conspired with them, the chance to offer the state a portion of their self-identified illicit gains. But it does not create a robust mechanism to verify the extent of their corruption or illicit gains. And it has no provision compelling them to testify against those who committed the most serious corrupt acts—such as Ben Ali and some of his relatives. Nor does it have clear provisions to guard against fraud and collusion that might defeat honest and substantial asset recovery. Nor is there a mechanism for transparency in the process, nor any space for public participation and debate once corrupt officials and business people come forward.

During negotiations for the [2013] Transitional Justice Law, legislators made it clear that they were resigned to the idea that only corrupt business people had the knowledge to move the economy forward. That is why an arbitration mechanism was included in the law, adding to the many functions of the TDC. There have been concerns about how this arbitration process would work. It clearly allows for the prosecution of those who either refuse arbitration or commit fraud. But now, arbitration that has not even been tried is being scuttled in favor of a new instrument that is even more convenient for high-level corrupt officials and business people.⁴¹

Aside from reinforcing the impunity of corrupt Ben Ali family members and officials, Essebsi’s version of “reconciliation” would have amended the transitional justice law and diminished the role of the TDC by creating a new amnesty-granting “reconciliation” commission.

In the end, the Essebsi government failed to enact the so-called economic reconciliation bill into law, and no broad amnesty for corruption that would have benefited Ben Ali and his business and political allies was granted. Instead, the government passed the more limited “administrative reconciliation” law in 2017, granting amnesty only to certain levels of public officials who could show that they had not personally profited from corrupt acts they had participated in. This law nonetheless contradicted the principle of accountability in the transitional justice law and compelled judges of the Judicial, Economic and Financial Pole, to whom amnesty applications under this law were submitted, to apply it restrictively.⁴² After extensive debates among themselves, the judges agreed to narrowly interpret the meaning of “public official” and warned that “if it is shown that an amnesty beneficiary knowingly altered the truth or hid what he gained unlawfully, the investigation and prosecution in such cases shall automatically resume.”⁴³

40 Geeta Koska, “Tunisia: The Price of Economic Reconciliation in the Transitional Justice Process,” *JusticeInfo.net*, Aug. 24, 2016, www.justiceinfo.net/en/truth-commissions/28851-tunisia-the-price-of-economic-reconciliation-in-the-transitional-justice-process.html

41 David Tolbert, “Tunisia’s ‘Reconciliation Bill’ Threatens Gains of the Revolution,” *ICTJ*, August 17, 2015, www.ictj.org/news/tunisia-reconciliation-bill-danger-gains-revolution

42 Organic Law no. 2017-62 of Oct. 24, 2017, relating to the “Reconciliation in the Administrative Domain.”

43 Jamal Shaba, “A Review of the Administrative and Economic Amnesty Contribution to Ensure Accountability for Corruption in TJ Context,” presented at the ICTJ workshop series “Youth and Anti-Corruption Efforts as a Tool to Accountability in a Transitional Justice Process,” second workshop, June 15, 2019, Tunis.

The Young People Who Will Not Forgive

The TDC opposed the original and broad economic reconciliation bill, as did some opposition parliamentarians. But what decisively led to the bill's defeat was the resistance of a new youth-led movement called Manich Msamah, or "I Will Not Forgive."⁴⁴ The movement organized street protests across the country, produced catchy posters (including "Wanted" posters that featured prominent dictatorship cronies), and expanded and mobilized through Facebook. All throughout, the group maintained a single-issue profile, focused on stopping the broad amnesty proposed in the economic reconciliation bill.

The youth movement and the TDC were both opposed to granting amnesty for corruption. However, young activists in Manich Msamah and other youth-led movements were skeptical about transitional justice institutions like the TDC because, as one activist told ICTJ in a meeting between the organization and the Manich Msamah movement in 2017, they perceived transitional justice as not revolutionary enough: "Transitional justice is not about challenging the development policies that led to marginalization and enabled corruption." This skepticism was not misplaced. During our discussions, one activist from Gafsa questioned why the TDC final report "did not mention the problems of the phosphate mining basin region, as if it were not among their priorities. The TDC didn't address the goals of the revolution such as employment and dignity."⁴⁵

Manich Msamah activists debated whether to defend the state-guided TDC process or to insist on pursuing a trajectory away from it. Ultimately, young activists ended up supporting, if not the TDC directly, the state's transitional justice process. They rationalized this by concluding that ensuring impunity for corrupt Ben Ali officials, associates, and family members would in fact go against the demands for dignity and structural change that the revolution sought. Charfeddine Kellil, whose "Group of 25" lawyers joined the Manich Msamah movement, said that the reconciliation bill "would have whitewashed and normalized corruption and defeated one of the strongest pillars of transitional justice, the fight against corruption during the dictatorship."⁴⁶

Despite police harassment,⁴⁷ the movement quickly grew. It was perceived as both militant and above partisan political agendas. In summer 2015, Manich Msamah activists occupied public spaces and streets in 11 cities throughout Tunisia. They held marches and sit-ins in Nabeul, Jandouba, Baja, Kef, Sousse, Kairouan, Sfax, Gafsa, Gabes, and Touzeur. Marchers convened at the headquarters of Tunisia's largest labor union UGTT (Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail), and around 1,500 young activists occupied Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis and called for a "popular state of emergency." In September 2015, Manich Msamah activists waited until the first TDC arbitration agreement was signed by the commission, with Ben Ali's son-in-law businessman Slim Chiboub. Manich Msamah responded with a new campaign called "Wanted" to bring to justice the most notorious Ben Ali regime businessmen and colleagues, including Chiboub.⁴⁸

44 ICTJ, "Tunisian Activists Oppose Law That Would Grant Amnesty to Corruption," July 22, 2016, www.ictj.org/news/tunisia-reconciliation-protest-amnesty-corruption

45 ICTJ interview with Ali Souilhi.

46 ICTJ interview with Charfeddine Kellil.

47 Debora del Pestoia and Lamia Ledrisi, "Tunisia's Fight against Its Revolutionary Youth," *Open Democracy*, Jan. 6, 2016, www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/tunisia-s-fight-against-its-revolutionary-youth/

48 Vanessa Szakal, "Manich Msamah Declares a 'Grassroots State of Emergency,'" *Nawaat*, July 27, 2016, <https://nawaat.org/portail/2016/07/27/manich-msamah-declares-a-grassroots-state-of-emergency/>

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After the more limited administrative reconciliation bill was enacted, Manich Msamah started a “name and shame” campaign, targeting parliamentarians who voted for the bill. Parliamentarians opposing the bill also denounced the new law for promoting impunity for corruption and blocking truth-seeking efforts.⁴⁹

After these campaigns, Manich Msamah then ceased to exist as such, having achieved significant success. The experience proved how a horizontal, nonhierarchical, and one-issue movement could be one of the most effective transitional justice strategies. The activists who formed Manich Msamah gained significant experience in promoting accountability for corruption and used this experience in other movements. They even influenced many other youth groups outside Tunisia, including those who successfully brought down the Omar Al-Bashir dictatorship in Sudan and the Bouteflika government in Algeria.⁵⁰

But the most strategic accomplishment of the movement was showing that simply prosecuting perpetrators of corruption and recovering their assets would not be enough. Even if corrupt actors were prosecuted and convicted, they could be given amnesty. Even if they were compelled to surrender some of their illicit assets, a state controlled by someone like Essebsi could “reconcile” with them and let them keep most of what they had acquired and retain their power to bend the public system for their personal aims. All of these things could happen within a transitional justice process that does not address the economic policies that enabled corruption and that have continued after the end of the dictatorship. After Manich Msamah, according to Leila Riahi, young activists have an ongoing cause:

“In 2011, people revolted against the consequences of this corrupt system. The next step is to identify the elements of this system and fight it precisely where it resides... we need to keep watching and understanding this corrupt system until we get rid of the oligarchy.”

In 2011, people revolted against the consequences of this corrupt system. The next step is to identify the elements of this system and fight it precisely where it resides, and even if the Manich Msamah movement is no longer active, we need to keep watching and understanding this corrupt system until we get rid of the oligarchy.⁵¹

Student Groups Confronting Corruption in Schools

Education is one of the pillars that built the postcolonial Tunisian state. But under Ben Ali, the geographical distribution of educational institutions that favored Tunis and coastal areas resulted in unequal access to education and extreme marginalization. Student unions such as UGET and UGTE had long been prominent civil society groups tackling

49 The Democratic Trend and Democratic Coalition Joint Statement, September 14, 2017.

50 David D. Kirkpatrick, “Arab Spring, Again? Nervous Autocrats Look out Windows as Crowds Swell,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/04/08/world/africa/arab-spring-north-africa-protesters.html. See also “The State of the Sudanese and Algerian Uprisings” (video), www.youtube.com/watch?v=71U7ovPNHCE&feature=youtu.be. It states, “Today in Sudan and Algeria, people’s uprisings that broke out this past winter have won momentous victories for the first time since the start of the 2011 Revolutions, overthrowing the heads of the regimes in both countries. But the people have vowed to go beyond the overthrow of their dictators, to take down the entire structure of the old regimes and replace them with governments that represent the people.”

51 ICTJ interview with Leila Riahi, July 17, 2019, in Tunis. Riahi is a co-founder of the Tunisian Economic Observatory and a member of the Manich Msamah and Ma Galoulnech movements.

corruption in schools and advocating for more democratic decision-making processes inside university boards. For Nawres Zoghbi, an active member of UGET, the combination of corruption under Ben Ali and World Bank–prescribed “structural adjustment” programs led to the devaluation of the university degrees of many Tunisian graduates.⁵² Their knowledge and training no longer matched the needs of the industries and coastal regions that were favored by the World Bank–backed and foreign–funded development approach implemented by Ben Ali’s dictatorship.⁵³ This shifting policy environment provided opportunities for corruption, too. Ben Ali promoted the so-called LMD (License, Master, Doctorate) university system as a form of modernization, but UGET activists dismiss it as a tool for privatization and profiteering by Ben Ali’s private-school-owning cronies.

Hamed Jmal, a regional secretary of UGTE in Sfax, expressed his frustration about the TDC missing the opportunity to tackle issues related to corruption inside the education sector, both public and private, established by the Ben Ali regime. To promote accountability for corruption in education, Jmal advocates for “transparent control mechanisms to monitor university budgets and management, financial autonomy, and...coordination with INLUCC anti-corruption-based training programs for students.”⁵⁴

Confronting Corruption in the Energy Sector: The Gafsa Case

Tunisia is the world’s fifth largest exporter of phosphates, and the state-owned phosphate mining company, *Compagnie des Phosphates de Gafsa* (CPG), accounts for about 4 percent of the country’s gross domestic product. Paradoxically, the Gafsa region, where phosphate mines are located, is still one of the poorest and most polluted parts of the country. Gafsa’s poverty and pollution, according to Ali Souilhi, a local activist, are rooted in corruption and the region’s marginalization. In an interview with ICTJ, he mentioned the kinds of corruption in the mining basin region that catalyzed the revolution, and after the dictatorship, still drive protests in Gafsa. According to Souilhi, in order to silence Tunisians demanding jobs and to artificially show “development” in the region, the dictatorship opened insecure and nonfunctional positions in the state-owned phosphate company: “Over 1,000 employees would go from Redeyef to the company every morning and ‘hit the like button’ [sign for attendance] and then go back home without doing anything.”⁵⁵ This precariousness of employment, and its indignity, led the Union of Unemployed Graduates (an association Ben Ali never recognized) to organize what would become the 2008 Gafsa protests.⁵⁶

52 ICTJ interview with Nawres Zoghbi, September 17, 2019, in Tunis. Zoghbi is a member of UGET representing students in the High Institute of Human Sciences of Tunis. In 1988, just a year after Ben Ali ousted Habib Bourguiba in a coup, the World Bank gave the Ben Ali dictatorship a \$150 million “structural adjustment loan” conditioned on austerity and removing tariffs and other measures protecting Tunisian agriculture and industry. See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/655971468310534635/Tunisia-Higher-Education-Restructuring-Project>. This loan was followed four years later by a \$75 million loan to the dictatorship labeled “Tunisia Higher Education Restructuring Project” that would change the country’s higher education system ostensibly, so that it “would be geared towards labor market needs.” See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/655971468310534635/Tunisia-Higher-Education-Restructuring-Project>

53 Nagazi Ahmed, “Reading the Shortcomings of the Tunisian Educational System,” *World Bank Blogs—Published on Arab Voices*, October 30, 2017.

54 ICTJ interview with Hamed Jmal, September 25, 2019, in Sfax. Jmal is a regional secretary of UGTE.

55 ICTJ interview with Ali Souilhi.

56 On December 31, 2018, the TDC transferred corruption case files to the Gafsa Specialized Chamber; these included cases from 136 identified victims who suffered from nonexistent jobs in CPG-Gafsa, but the case proceedings are not moving forward. Eric Gobe, “The Gafsa Mining Basin between Riots and a Social Movement: Meaning and Significance of a Protest Movement in Ben Ali’s Tunisia,” HAL Archives (halshs-0057826), 2010, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/file/index/docid/557826/filename/Tunisia_The_Gafsa_mining_basin_between_Riots_and_Social_Movement.pdf

A larger-scale example of corruption involves the misuse of the Conversion and Development Fund for Mining Centers (CDFMC) before and after the 2011 revolution.⁵⁷ Under Ben Ali, the dictator's colleagues used it for their own businesses. After 2011, misuse of the CDFMC continued, but opportunities for corruption multiplied since over 90 percent of the fund is now available for the entire region, not just the mining basin area.⁵⁸ A longer-term problem that exacerbates marginalization and corruption in Gafsa is the damage to the environment that has not been meaningfully mitigated by the state or the phosphate company. The chemical industries managed to exhaust Gafsa's water resources to their lowest levels and pollute water irreversibly, which has caused a free fall of the production of pistachios, dates, and pomegranates in the oasis of Gafsa.⁵⁹

Corruption in the Health Care Sector

Under Bourguiba, Tunisia established a national health insurance program and a relatively reliable three-level system of primary clinics, secondary-level regional hospitals, and university-level specialized medical centers. Under Ben Ali, cracks appeared in the system due to the 1980s economic crisis. But the option of providing more public funding to health care was "quickly curtailed by an IMF-imposed liberalization of government departments as a condition for \$386 million in loans."⁶⁰ For its part, the World Bank encouraged the entry of the private sector into what was an accessible public health care system.⁶¹ These austerity and privatization measures encouraged corruption and led to a health care system "on the verge of collapse."⁶²

Young health care workers organized into a movement called Balance Ton Hôpital (or "Expose Your Hospital"). One of its leaders, a doctor named Jed Henchiri, told ICTJ that corruption is deeply rooted in both the health care and pharmaceutical industries, particularly with regard to procurement.⁶³ But Henchiri cited even more concerning misconduct that arguably comes from the same combination of corruption, IMF-imposed austerity measures, and World Bank-prescribed privatization that severely weakened the health care sector under Ben Ali:

57 On May 15, 2014, the Auditors Court published a mission report related to the activities of the Reconversion and Development Fund for Mining Centers (RDFMC), which was created according to a constitutive contract on November 28, 1991. The report's findings reveal that 97.6 percent of the RDFMC's capital was held by the CPG in the form of an investment company in the spirit of Law no. 92 of August 2, 1988, later amended by Law no. 87 of Oct. 30, 1995. As such, the RDFMC was determined not to contribute to the development of Gafsa and Kef Governorates, where it implements its projects. The Auditors Court report further found that out of 123 projects in Gafsa and Kef, to which the RDFMC allocated 23 million dinars capital, 52 projects have failed since 1991. The report documented shortcomings in the management of the project files, including a lack of verification of participations, laxity in the recovery of participations, and a lack of field monitoring. See Auditors Court Mission Report, May 15, 2014, 477–499, www.courdescomptes.nat.tn/Fr/thematiques_58_4_0_7_26_0000_0000_Fonds%20de%20Reconversion%20et%20de%20D%C3%A9veloppement%20des%20Centres%20M%C3%A9dicaux_225#?

58 According to the general secretary of UGTT, "Gafsa had warned against bankruptcy risk of the Gafsa Phosphates Company and called for settling urgently the Company debts that have been cumulating since 2016 to the estimation of 800 Million TND." Business News, October 1, 2019.

59 The TDC managed to transfer a financial corruption case file to the Gafsa Specialized Chamber, with an unknown number of victims suffering from environmental pollution due to phosphates production, but the TDC's final report does not provide findings for this purpose. See TDC Final Report "Executive Summary," May 2019, 84.

60 Hafawa Rebhi, "Sick Tunisia: Austerity and Vested Interests Destroying Health Services," *Middle East Eye*, April 11, 2017, www.middleeasteye.net/news/sick-tunisia-austerity-and-vested-interests-destroying-health-services

61 Sameh El-Saharty et al., *Tunisia Health Sector Study* (Washington, DC: Human Development Group, Middle East and North Africa region, World Bank, 2006), www.researchgate.net/publication/271217116_Tunisia_Health_Sector_Study

62 Hafawa Rebhi, "Sick Tunisia."

63 ICTJ interview with Jed Henchiri.

Some doctors give appointments to cancer patients with a delay of six months in order to push them to go to a private clinic, where he [the doctor] can make more money from the commission for that referral. Since the law forbids working in both sectors, the doctor from the public hospital registers the patient under the name of a doctor in the private clinic and everybody takes their share. The health sector suffers from corruption in acquisition of medical materials through public tenders, which the youth movement denounced along with heavy bureaucracy obstructing the control mechanisms of Health Ministry.

World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs and Corruption in Agriculture

In 1999, Ben Ali reinforced and institutionalized marginalization in rural agriculture-dependent areas by ordering the creation of Groups for Agriculture Development (GDAs), which in turn allowed water-distribution associations to control water distribution for irrigation. This led to mismanagement and corruption.⁶⁴ It also sparked protests in rural areas, including through the nonpayment of water bills.⁶⁵ But corruption in water distribution did not happen in a vacuum. The changes in agriculture policies under Ben Ali came from World Bank-funded development programs that “favor[ed] the reallocation of resources to coastal areas to the detriment of interior and agricultural regions.”⁶⁶ This was accompanied by “liberalization processes [that] fostered export-oriented agricultural development...large-scale agricultural enterprises and irrigated farming.”

In the town of Kairouan, 13 GDAs created under the dictatorship never operated until 2015. As a result, communities were unable to pay water extraction costs and facilities were poorly maintained. ICTJ spoke with environmental and anti-corruption activist Imen Nasrallah about the need for transparency, accountability, and comprehensive reforms in rural water distribution.⁶⁷ She emphasized that these reforms can help improve the lives of rural Tunisians who depend on agriculture, but that fighting corruption at the local level will not be enough without revisiting the development policies that led to it in the first place. According to an economist who studied the impact of Ben Ali’s agricultural policies, “The underlying sources of the revolutionary upsurge [in rural areas comes from] the detrimental effects of IMF and World Bank-inspired neo-liberal policies on people’s capacity to secure decent work and livelihoods. [In] Tunisia, processes of agricultural restructuring during the past 20 years contributed importantly to fuel the revolutionary dynamics.”⁶⁸

64 Decree no. 99-1819 of August 23, 1999, “Portant approbation des statuts-type des groupements de développement dans le secteur de l’agriculture et de la pêche,” or approving the creation of development units in the agriculture and fisheries sector.

65 “Farmers, as well as rural households are asking for a free access to water and for the state to reengage in the management of water resources that had been transferred to water user associations, both for potable and irrigation water. Water related conflicts and mobilizations, which challenge state withdrawal from the management of water resources, express the rise of demands for a more equitable sharing of water resources and more generally for better living conditions in rural areas.” Alia Gana, “The Rural and Agricultural Roots of the Tunisian Revolution: When Food Security Matters,” *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* 19, no. 2 (2012): 201–213, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01165135/document>

66 Nazanine Moshiri, “All in the Family: The Ben Alis and Tunisia,” *Al Jazeera*, May 14, 2014, www.aljazeera.com/blogs/africa/2014/03/98686.html

67 ICTJ interview with Imen Nasrallah, August 29, 2019, in Tunis. Nasrallah is a former member of a GDA and a civil society activist in many environment-related groups.

68 Gana, “Rural and Agricultural Roots.”

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The Petrofac and Kamour Movements and Demands for ‘Work, Freedom, Dignity’

In 2016 and 2017, two separate but very similar youth-led movements emerged in Kerkenah Island and deep-south Tataouine, respectively. The Petrofac and Kamour movements focused on the two major oil and gas companies to which the movements’ members addressed their demands for job opportunities in the two regions. Both movements emerged six years after young Tunisians seeking “work, freedom, [and] dignity” brought down a dictator and involved unemployed young people from the same impoverished regions where the revolution started. As the *New York Times* put it in a story about Kamour, the movement’s demand for employment was both basic and not new:

The demonstrators are representative of a new generation that has come of age in relative freedom, only to face the prospect of long-term unemployment. A large number are university graduates, organized and articulate. All out of work, they have forged a united movement out of protesters from a swath of towns and villages across the area.⁶⁹

One leading young activist in Kerkenah, Ahmed Souissi, explained to ICTJ that the Petrofac movement “started with basic demands, asking the company to provide employment and contribute to the development of Kerkenah Island,” but then shifted to calls to hold the company and its officials accountable for corruption.⁷⁰

Like Petrofac, the Kamour youth-led movement used direct action to express their demands. They occupied and shut down a gas production site in the middle of the desert. Tarek Haddad, a Kamour movement spokesperson, led the group in enter-



Protesters belonging to the youth-led Kamour movement join the Manich Msamah march on May 13, 2017, in Kamour, Tunisia. (Manich Msamah)

ing into an agreement with officials in June 2017 to consider their employment-related demands.⁷¹ But these demands, according to the movement, have been ignored, so they have continued their protests.⁷² ICTJ met with some of them, along with other activists

69 Carlotta Gall, “Young and Unemployed, Tunisians Agitate for a ‘Second Revolution,’” *New York Times*, May 27, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/05/27/world/africa/unemployed-tunisians-revolution.html

70 ICTJ interview with Ahmed Souissi, Sept. 9, 2019, in Kerkenah. Souissi is the former coordinator of the Union of Unemployed Graduates in Kerkenah and a leading member of the Petrofac sit-ins.

71 Frida Dahmani, “Tunisia: Arrest of Tarek Haddad, Spokesperson for the Coordination of the Sit-in in El-Kamour,” *Jeune Afrique*, July 18, 2008, www.jeuneafrique.com/600903/politique/tunisie-arrestation-de-tarek-haddad-porte-parole-de-la-coordination-du-sit-in-del-kamour/

72 “According to the agreement between the government and protesters, the government would offer jobs to 1,400 young people in the region, invest 80 million Tunisian dinars (around US \$29 million) in the regional development fund, employ 500 unemployed graduates in the regional environment protection agency, and train 500 unemployed graduates in the field of petroleum activities while granting them 500 dinars during their training, with the government estimating that this would employ around 70 percent of the Tataouine governorate’s youth.” Dahmani, “Tunisia.”

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and civil society groups in the region, in December 2019 in Tataouine to discuss what forms of reparation might address grievances about marginalization and unemployment.

Conclusions and Reflections

The Arab Spring demonstrated what young Tunisians can do when the repression, corruption, unemployment, and marginalization around them reach a breaking point. Some will act out of despair, as Mohammed Bouazizi did in his act of self-immolation. Others will be moved by their despair as much as anger to join a revolution. Recently, young Tunisians have exercised their right to vote not just to reject a symbol of corruption linked to Ben Ali but to gamble on a new president who, at the very least, is not identified with the former dictatorship or tied to new post-dictatorship elites.⁷³ Others, such as the young men in Kamour, have learned from the aftermath of the revolution and concluded that merely protesting does not lead directly to work or dignity.

The young activists who participated in discussions for this paper agree on the necessity of accountability for dictatorship-era corruption and justice for human rights violations under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. They also agree that the transitional justice measures the state has taken so far are not sufficient to fulfill the needs and expectations of Tunisian young people. Overcoming the impunity of the individual perpetrators of corruption and human rights violations is important to them, but many of them also wondered whether that was all that transitional justice could do.

With respect to corruption, some discussion participants (including both activists and state officials) understand that institutional reforms and anti-corruption monitoring mechanisms are an essential part of transitional justice. They support putting these systems in place within the state's regulatory, administrative, procurement, and economic and social policymaking institutions. For activists who led the fight against the economic reconciliation bill, seeking transparency and naming, shaming, or even prosecuting corrupt individuals are indispensable actions. Others think those tactics might stop a bill, open a trial, or even lead to punishment but will not remove the root causes of corruption. This is why some activists who made up Manich Msamah later formed part of a different coalition called Fech Nstnew? (or "What Are We Waiting For?").⁷⁴ Both a question and a movement, Fech Nstnew resisted austerity measures implemented by the Essebsi government in 2018 as a condition for loans from the IMF and asked why they should be imposed on already suffering Tunisians.⁷⁵

"We have talked about human rights and corruption but did not go back to what really fuels corruption: the economic and social policies of Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba. In order to fight corruption, we need to rethink and restructure Tunisia's development model."

This intersection between accountability for corruption and demanding change in Tunisia's development paradigm is where youth movements like Manich Msamah meet with the Petrofac and Kamour protests as well as with the Fech Nstnew movement. This overlap is both actual and symbolic. As a description of

73 "Saied Elected Tunisia President on Tide of Youth Vote," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, October 15, 2019, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1946246/saied-elected-tunisia-president-tide-youth-vote>. "Around 90 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds voted for Saied, according to estimates by the Sigma polling institute, compared with 49.2 percent of voters over 60."

74 For more on "Fech Nstnew," see Ines Mahmoud, "Tunisians versus the IMF," *Political Critique*, February 5, 2018, <http://politicalcritique.org/world/2018/tunisians-versus-the-imf/>

75 Ines Mahmoud, "Tunisians Oppose the IMF," *Open Democracy*, January 24, 2018, www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/tunisia-rise-up-against-imf/

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one of many youth-led protests puts it, “Protesters in Kamour carried Manich Msamah signs, while slogans against multinational corporations in Tataouine were shouted in demonstrations against the amnesty law.”⁷⁶

Where should youth activism go past this intersection? Leila Riahi observed, “We have talked about human rights and corruption but did not go back to what really fuels corruption: the economic and social policies of Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba. In order to fight corruption, we need to rethink and restructure Tunisia’s development model.”⁷⁷ Even the TDC understood this. In 2019, the TDC chairperson called on the IMF to apologize for imposing economic policies that, according to the commission, enabled corruption and human rights violations during the dictatorship.⁷⁸

There is unity among young activists when it comes to demanding accountability for corruption. But there is also an emerging *and* shared understanding that rooting out corruption requires rejecting Tunisia’s paradigm of economic development that continues even now, years after the dictatorship that it bred ended.

76 Ines Mahmoud, “Tunisia’s Next Revolution,” *Jacobin*, February 17, 2018, www.jacobinmag.com/2018/02/tunisia-next-revolution

77 ICTJ, “An Unfinished Revolution: Tackling Corruption in Tunisia,” July 25, 2019, www.ictj.org/news/unfinished-revolution-tackling-corruption-tunisia

78 Olfa Belhassine, “Tunisia’s Truth Commission vs. France, the IMF and World Bank,” *JusticeInfo.net*, September 3, 2019, www.justiceinfo.net/en/truth-commissions/42302-tunisia-truth-commission-vs-france-imf-world-bank.html

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