Towards a critical geography of corruption and power in late capitalism

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Abstract

Corruption politics have received little attention in human geography. We offer a critical geography of corruption as an alternative to economistic framings that take corruption as an objective set of deviant practices mostly besetting states in the Global South. Instead, we theorize corruption as a historically shifting, subjective discourse about the abuse of entrusted power. Geographic and cognate disciplinary approaches reveal how corruption narratives become politicized and yoked to symbolic, material, and territorial regimes of power. We suggest that recent theories of urban informality provide a revealing lens into the ethico-politics and territorial struggles of contemporary capitalism across the North and South.

I Introduction

This article calls attention to a ubiquitous rhetoric that has captivated the world with renewed vigor: 'corruption'. Across the world, frustration with everyday and spectacular corruption has fomented social mobilization. A poignant example is the Arab Spring protests to topple pro-market authoritarian regimes ignited by a young street vender who self-immolated in protest of police bribe demands (AlSayyad and Guvenc, 2015; Gumbiner et al., 2012). The event exposed how ordinary people draw connections between everyday exploitation and the systemic moral decrepitude of the state. In Brazil, recent anticorruption protests have dovetailed with the rightwing take-over of the presidency, pursued, ironically, by politicians who themselves have damning records of corruption (Baiocchi and Silva, 2016). In India, corruption has long been a catchall term for the middle class to lambast the political class and its poorer constituents (Björkman, 2014; Jenkins, 2014). Yet, more recently, corruption has also provided a framework for marginalized groups to question land and resource dispossession by elites. It has also served as the official

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justification on the part of a right-wing government for a massive state-led demonetization drive to fight terrorism, counterfeit currency, and tax evasion.

Typically associated with the political theaters of the 'Third World', talk of corruption is also increasingly featured in the imaginaries of western liberal capitalism. In the 2016 US elections, for instance, allegations of corruption and a 'rigged system' abounded on both the Sanders left and Trump right. Donald Trump, a New York real estate magnate charged with fraud, leveraged anticorruption sentiments and the grievances of the 'forgotten' – while also stoking white nationalism – to win the American presidency. Talk of corruption is politically opportunistic, and can provide a platform for both progressive and regressive politics. As such, 'corruption' has a parasitic ability to attach itself to different political projects. As we argue here, corruption is a subjective and open-ended language used to indict various configurations and abuses of power that in some way do harm to the public interest, diversely construed. What makes corruption interesting is not so much the 'truth' of its existence, but the different formations of power it implicates, the contradictory worldviews it expresses, and the actions it motivates.

Attention to the political life of corruption is rare in human geography despite its relevance to key areas in the field. Earlier approaches in political geography took corruption as something given, measurable, and endemic to Third World contexts (Perry, 1997). A few critical geographical contributions since then have challenged such perspectives by highlighting the situated ethics, historical dynamics, and power relations imbued in the discourse and practice of corruption and anticorruption (Brown and Cloke, 2004; Jeffrey, 2002; Jeffrey and Young, 2014; Robbins, 2000). Anthropological contributions have been especially helpful in tracing the historically and socially constructed nature of corruption and how discourses of corruption reflect and remake ethico-political understandings of the state, the public, and the market (Gupta, 1995; Haller and Shore, 2005; Sampson, 2010; Wedel, 2012). Crucially, critical scholars and ethnographers are thoughtful about how researchers and research subjects use the term corruption rather than a priori applying it to observed acts.

From this starting point, we suggest that it is a timely moment to open corruption up for critical geographic inquiry. Recent articulations of corruption discourse and anticorruption efforts – not only in postcolonial and postsocialist contexts but also in the so-called advanced capitalist world – warrant new theoretical frames. The objective of this paper is to critically engage theories and illustrative cases from geography and the cognate fields of anthropology, political sociology, critical development studies, political science, and urban studies to advance a framework for a critical geography of corruption. We argue that corruption should be understood first and foremost as a shifting and situated discourse that is yoked to symbolic, material, and territorialized power, and that provides a lens into broader power relations and contestations in late capitalism. Our contribution is to offer a critical geography of corruption that attends to how this language gets mobilized in the context of ethical and political-economic struggles, with special attention to territorial dynamics that are so central to late capitalism. Our project also mobilizes new 'geographies of theory' (Roy, 2009a) by drawing on relevant debates from the South, especially on territoriality in postcolonial cities, which provide a useful but untapped lens into the politics of corruption across the North and South, and disrupts the usual unidirectional flow of concept frames on the topic. To date, such a critical geographic framework has not been available to think through corruption across both North and South.

Before embarking on this review, we suggest the following working definition of corruption:

corruption is a *normative discourse* about the abuse of entrusted power and resulting social decay that are always implicitly positioned relative to a perceived normal or previously 'uncorrupted' state of affairs. By 'entrusted power' we mean more than just power held by the state, which it is often taken to mean by anticorruption agencies such as Transparency International. We also mean power held by private or blurred public-private authorities that ostensibly serve a public purpose. Though corruption is often taken as a given (including by academics) in the sense that certain practices (such as bribery of state officials) are claimed to be objectively corrupt and a deviation from an accepted norm, we argue that this assumption must be treated as an effect of power. We suggest that symbolic, material, and territorial forms of power – forged through race, class, gender, and other hierarchical relations of difference – are especially influential in determining which actions, places, and bodies are deemed corrupt and which publics are imagined to be harmed by corruption at different historical junctures. We are particularly interested in how and when certain practices are thrown into question and become deviant or 'corrupt'. Conversely, we ask why some highly abusive, extractive, and dispossessing practices undertaken by entrusted agents merely proceed as normal to the workings of capitalism. In other words, we seek to develop a framing that centers on how corruption gets *politicized* in particular ways, and why. Put simply, we are interested in the work that the idea of corruption does in the struggle over power and resources.

To address this set of questions, we begin by providing a brief overview of mainstream perspectives on corruption and highlight critiques of this approach. We then suggest an alternative and critical scholarly framework in which corruption is understood as a shifting discourse that is inflected by three interrelated formations of power: (i) symbolic power, (ii) material power, and (iii) territorial power. While these arenas of power are difficult to separate out, we do so in order to organize the literature and key themes. The first of these, symbolic power, centers on scholarship that treats corruption as a cultural meaning system in which differently situated actors come to form ethical imaginations about what is, or is not, corrupt and act upon them. The second, material power, explores apparatuses of governance that usurp and concentrate wealth, land, and resources, through both ostensibly 'legal' and 'illegal' arrangements. Here, we are particularly interested in how and whether predatory acts are in fact framed and prosecuted as corrupt or not, and why. Our strategy here aims to further reinforce the notion that corruption is a selectively applied and slippery discourse.

Finally, the third attends to what we are calling territorial power, or sovereign control and struggles over space. Though not often explicitly concerned with corruption, we suggest that conceptualizations of territoriality and power – in particular, those offered in recent theories of informal Southern urbanism – are useful but under-examined in critical corruption literature. Such approaches to territory are necessarily also concerned with symbolic and material power because of how the control over space implicates both representational and resource struggles. Our sequencing thus indicates cumulative and interlocking, rather than independent, regimes of power. In exploring how talk of corruption articulates with these three arenas of power, we do not mean to provide a comprehensive survey of the literature. Rather, we focus on themes that we hope will be of special interest to human geographers. Geographers are especially well positioned to engage the meaning-making of corruption and its relation to different modalities of material and territorial power across the North and South. We suggest that the geographer's eye to space and territory provides unique insights into how the discursive politics surrounding corruption may have a 'family resemblance' across regions experiencing mounting social inequality, insecurity, and

dispossession under late capitalism. Such a spatio-politically attuned lens also has the capacity to glean the distinct meanings and usages of corruption across places and differently situated groups. Accordingly, we conclude with suggestions for further research into one salient arena that would benefit from a critical and global geography of corruption: corruption discourse and the rising tide of ethno-racial nationalist populism across the world today.

II Mainstream views on corruption and their critiques

Talk of corruption is of course not new. It waxes and wanes throughout history, shifting in meaning and attaching to salient moral, economic, and political concerns at key conjunctures. As Pocock (2016) meticulously traces, British and American political commentators in the 17th and 18th centuries were obsessed with 'corruption', defined at the time as the loss of virtue among leaders and citizenry due to the influence of growing concentrations of wealth and new uses of finance. At this time, western corruption discourse became entangled with competing (civic republican vs. liberal) conceptualizations of public and private where the 'public good' represented either a site of harm or benefit in relation to private self-interest (Matthews, 1994). However, moral concerns over the corrupting influence of wealth would soon be drowned out by the growing hegemony of supporters of liberal market capitalism. For instance, Marieke de Goede (2005) charts a genealogical turn as finance and speculation, once denigrated through gendered idioms of fraud and gambling in the 1700s, were later recast as legitimate, natural, and even virtuous in North Atlantic contexts through new discourses of rational calculation. From the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, American discourses of corruption further shifted away from a critique of wealth towards a focus on 'boss-ism' or the

political machinery of patronage between politicians and their lower-class and immigrant constituents in American cities (Engels, 2017).

This historically nuanced analysis of how corruption is deployed as a moral language that shifts according to political-economic and other power relations is absent in what we are referring to as 'mainstream' views on corruption. Mainstream understandings of corruption have been primarily framed through Cold War-era modernization theories and Weberian notions of rational bureaucracy, which read corruption as a symptom of 'weak states', poor separation between the public and private realms, and incomplete development (Huntington, 1968; Nye, 1967). Focusing primarily on newly independent states of the so-called 'Third World', corruption is applied a priori by western social scientists in this literature with scant regard to history, culture, or political economy. For instance, in a seminal article by the political scientist Joseph Nye (1967: 420), corruption was defined as 'behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains'. Bribery, nepotism, and misappropriation of public resources – again, actions defined from the outside – were all accordingly cited as examples of corruption, regardless of whether research subjects agreed. Eschewing moralistic approaches, Nye further suggested that corruption sometimes provided significant benefits for development in poorer countries. Though he concluded that overall the costs of corruption exceeded its benefits, he made an important exception for 'top level corruption involving modern inducements' (Nye, 1967: 427); in other words, corruption was acceptable as long as it supported modernization and capitalism. While acknowledging that America and Europe had not been immune from corruption, Nye exemplified most mid-20th-century corruption theorists who generally elided the historical role of colonial regimes and western perpetrators. These

theorists were also relatively unconcerned with rooting corruption out, assuming it would disappear as Third World societies transitioned from 'traditional' to 'modern'. James Scott (1969) was an important exception; his study counters racialized depictions of 'traditional' rulers as inherently corrupt and instead insisted that European colonial officials who blatantly plundered through purchased posts 'could scarcely be regarded as models of probity'.

However, things changed with the end of the Cold War. Corruption emerged as an obsession of policy intervention from the 1990s onwards with the global push for market-driven reforms. We can think of this as 'revisionist' mainstream corruption thinking. Skepticism about the so-called benefits of corruption, and more generally the role of the state, and the desire to create an enabling environment for markets and businesses, undergirded this new corruption agenda. Moreover, with the end of the Cold War, allegiances to corrupt dictatorships were no longer required to keep left insurgencies at bay (Wedel, 2012). As Johnston (2005) notes, a new 'consensus' on corruption emerged both among academics (particularly neoclassical economists and political scientists) and policy-makers defining corruption in singular fashion as 'the abuse of public office for private gain' (World Bank, 1997: 8). Corruption – and by association, the state – served as an obstacle to social and economic development in this worldview, a 'disease' to be actively eradicated (Wedel, 2012).

Apart from the fact that corruption was taken as a given, and not as a subjective language, this consensus was based on one additional flawed assumption. This was an almost exclusive focus on state bribery (and embezzlement to a lesser degree) in non-western contexts where corruption was framed as a problem of delinquent states. Economistic approaches proposed by Rose-Ackerman (1996), Klitgaard (1988), and others attributed such problems to government officials' rent-seeking behavior and distorted market incentives or the 'principal-agent problem' that defined the deemed misalignment between the interests of officials and those of the public they were meant to serve. Individual venality often provided the target of blame, what anthropologists Haller and Shore (2005) call 'the rotten apple' problem, with only cursory acknowledgement of the historical roots and structural causes of such transactions and the role of complicit private and transnational entities. At the height of neoliberal orthodoxy in the early 1990s, corruption was posited as a problem that could only be remedied through liberalization, deregulation, and an overall minimization of the state's role in the economy. Accompanying the consensus, a vigorous institutionalized 'anticorruption industry' (Sampson, 2010) took hold in development policy circles under the leadership of economists connected to the World Bank and its sister agency, Transparency International.

Consensus assumptions run through dominant theories today, albeit with a less punishing stance towards states and a positive role for institutions. Among these are a self-contradictory praising of personal ties or 'social capital' for combatting corruption (Gephart, 2014), dovetailing with a general trend towards a 'revisionist neoliberal' obsession with participatory development and good governance (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Still rare among mainstream framings are reflections on systemic extractive relationships, often dominated by transnational corporations, which often (though not always) operate completely legally but are nonetheless complicit with ostensibly 'corrupt' local agents. A host of critiques have challenged the anticorruption industry's market-driven ideological underpinnings, damaging policies, apolitical approaches, and obsession with metrics, not to mention inattention to corruption in the west (Brown and Cloke, 2004; Bukovansky, 2006; Harrison, 2006; Hindess, 2005; Sampson, 2010; Shore, 2003; Wedel, 2012). For instance, Brown and Cloke

(2005: 619) focus on the dire outcomes of western-supported anticorruption efforts in Nicaragua, which they argue 'merely provided further sources of patronage for the clientelistic political system'. A failure to address the country's complex political culture – itself a legacy of Cold War geopolitics and western-supported dictatorial regimes that later advanced neoliberal interventions – resulted in the magnification of 'some of the worst elements of Nicaragua's political culture' (Brown and Clocke, 2005: 619). Other studies take a different tack, showing that the notion that corruption must be rooted out for development to occur is misplaced. Invoking earlier modernization theories, these scholars focus on the positive developmentalist outcomes of corruption. Kang's (2002) study of corruption in Korea, for instance, debunks the notion that rapid growth requires clean and efficient bureaucracies. Mushtaq Khan (2002: 166) similarly argues that the World Bank's approach to expanded markets as the antidote to corruption is fundamentally flawed given that 'the process of capitalist development itself generates powerful incentives and motives for corruption'. All are fundamentally agreed that corruption cannot be analyzed, let alone addressed, without careful reflection on histories of state formation, and that anticorruption efforts must be interrogated for their ideological underpinnings rather than readily accepted for their political neutrality.

These critical studies upend the mainstream consensus, providing new ways of defining corruption and understanding its causes and implications for the public. And yet even critical approaches may elide or underestimate a key feature of corruption: that it is fundamentally 'a category of thought and organizing principle' (Haller and Shore, 2005: 2) – a collection of subjective stories often imposed from the outside, but also generated from the inside, about the abuse of entrusted power. Such stories may reinforce the social and political economic agendas of the powerful but also may be repurposed to contest them (Walton, 2016). The approach to corruption as meaning-making helps to tackle questions untouched in mainstream debates: How do conceptions and idioms of corruption emerge and change across cultural contexts, space, and time? How do they straddle and remake taken-for-granted boundaries of public/private, illegal/legal, and state/society/market? How is corruption *discourse* imbricated in the advancement and contestation of political symbolism, material power, and territorial rule? What are the concrete stakes of diverse ethical understandings of corruption under contemporary capitalism? The following three sections explore how corruption as a discourse articulates with different regimes of power.

III Corruption and symbolic power

Starting in the 1990s, humanistic scholarship began to push corruption theorization beyond universalizing, positivist, and ahistoric definitions to consider the diverse ways in which corruption is interpreted, represented, and leveraged as a discourse, including by academics and policy specialists themselves. Anthropologists and postcolonial scholars sought to study how corruption's meanings shift across time and context, and how talk of corruption by research subjects symbolizes deeper malaise about the interpenetrations between the state and society and public and private life, even if it is used in highly contradictory ways.

The symbolic and imaginative dimensions of corruption are perhaps most thoroughly elucidated in a path-breaking essay by Akhil Gupta (1995: 385), which examines how talk of corruption in village life serves to 'draw attention to the powerful cultural practices by which the state is symbolically represented to its employees and to citizens of the nation'. Dissecting vernacular uses of the term, Gupta argues that corruption narratives enable the state to be brought into view as a spatially disaggregated

and internally inconsistent formation that straddles public and private divides. Poor and middle-income farmers participate in corruption talk to recount their frustrations in accessing vital services and navigating disparate demands and hierarchies in various state bodies – from welfare to public hospitals. Here, corruption talk serves as an ethical 'diagnostic of the state' (Gupta, 1995: 389), while also enabling ordinary citizens to conceive of themselves as a harmed 'public' and articulate their rights. Gupta's work is echoed by Jenkins (2014), who suggests that corruption has had varied symbolic uses in political rhetoric to make the state visible in India over the past 60 years.

Taking this line of analysis further, geographers Jeffrey and Young's (2014) study of lower middle-class men in north India reveals how malleable and politically instrumental corruption talk can be for those who wield it. Dubious activities – including informal brokerage, the manipulation of government documents, and influence peddling – offer a lucrative living for unemployed young men in a neoliberal context of dwindling opportunities for salaried work. Young men secure their businesses through strong-arm tactics while also carefully cultivating a public reputation for honesty, nurtured partially through tactical anticorruption activism. They manage to euphemize their actions as a clever form of 'entrepreneurialism' [*jugaad*] rather than as 'corruption', even as they lambast state officials for *their* corruption.

The study reinforces the situated morality of corruption discourse where it often emerges as something that 'others' do to the detriment of an imagined public (Anjaria, 2009; Das, 2015). Such contradictory corruption politics are paralleled by similar rural dynamics in the 1990s where wealthy sugarcane farmers were able to reproduce their economic dominance by simultaneously participating in bribe-giving while also protesting state corruption (Jeffrey, 2002). Both studies are animated by a Bourdieusian framing of a 'habitus' of social reproduction

in which diverse class, gender, and caste groups mobilize symbolic, cultural, and emotional resources to leverage corruption discourse to their advantage in ways that seem confounding and contradictory to outside observers (Jeffrey, 2010). It is thus that ethnographers have argued that corruption constitutes a continuum that has 'its own morality' (Haller, 2005: 12) or 'ordinary' sense of ethics (Fassin and Das, 2012). In other words, some corruption is considered worse than others, and the corruption of others is always worse than your own. Lazar's (2007) study of corruption talk in Bolivia, for instance, shows how popular assessments of politicians' accountability in public works projects demarcates acceptable from egregious levels of corruption. Other studies demonstrate how a range of local symbolic and cultural norms may be incongruent with singular western definitions of corruption (Hasty, 2005; Lomnitz, 1995; Shah, 2009).

Drawing on the African context, De Sardan (1999) reframes singular understandings of corruption to focus on a broad set of legal and extralegal activities that fall within a 'corruption complex'. Such activities include bribery, extortion, nepotism, and embezzlement. But they also include influence peddling, gift exchanges, and other socio-cultural norms associated with a 'moral economy'. Here the prevalence of communal networks and logics of reciprocity explain why corruption is banalized and legitimated in one instance and condemned in the next – a situation that mainstream understandings of corruption are ill-equipped to deal with. In some cases, as in Witsoe's (2011) study of Indian *dalits* (the so-called untouchable castes), corruption is sometimes even celebrated as an indicator of upward mobility and access to state power by those who have long been denied these things. Such manipulations of the corruption continuum are not, De Sardan insists, simply holdovers from a 'traditional' past but were actively produced through histories of colonialism and postcolonialism (see also Mamdani, 1996).

While these approaches remind us that ethics are deeply shaped by history and social and cultural symbols, they have sometimes been mobilized towards simplistic cultural relativism in ways that obscure relations of power. For instance, a recent World Bank (2015: 60) report combines behavioral economics with qualitative research to designate local cultures and norms upholding corruption as a barrier to development: in the report's words, 'country of origin can predict corrupt actions'. As in the mainstream consensus, corruption is taken as endogenous to certain political boundaries, while the role of transnational and private actors and (neo)colonial histories are neglected. Moreover, this sort of cultural relativism neglects the reality that if corruption seems to be more prevalent in certain societies or among certain groups, it might stem from the fact that people are simply more prone to *talking* about it (Parry, 2000) and using it as a lens into social and political life, as discussed in Gupta's work.

In addition to place and context, corruption discourse also provides a shifting moral-ethical language for voicing discontent over political economic changes at key historical moments as well as for diagnosing culprits. For instance in Perestroika era USSR, the privatization of national assets and the hyper accumulation of wealth became associated with the moral decay of the state where, ironically, bandits were seen as more honest than officials (Ries, 2002). Studies around the world also demonstrate how in such moments of crisis corruption talk and its symbolism can be powerfully fused with derogatory racial, class, caste, and ethnic stereotypes (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006; Teltumbde, 2012). Racialized notions of social decay qua corruption have fueled populist rage in the US in the wake of decades of neoliberal transformations resulting in mounting inequality and changing demographics as evident in the 2016 elections, an especially revealing case to which we return in our conclusion.

In sum, talk of corruption wields and is shaped by symbolic power. Corruption talk serves as a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1977: 35) that imaginatively delimits state, society, identity, and class at particular historical junctures while also serving to critique how power can have damaging effects on the public. The literature reviewed in this section suggests that allegations of corruption are highly subjective and power-laden, even when they appear to be widespread and commonplace. Yet such idioms, situated and malleable as they may be, are not completely arbitrary. Rather they are deeply contoured by the relations of force and struggles over resources and life capacities at the heart of capitalist development, which orient how corruption discourse is mobilized and to what end. Accordingly, we turn next to scholarship that is not necessarily concerned with corruption as a sphere of symbolism, but rather sees practices that are sometimes called out as corrupt – and often not – as inextricable from capitalist accumulation. We review the following literature not only to reinforce how slippery and opportunistic corruption talk can be but also to make explicit the political stakes of corruption discourse under systemic conditions of widening global inequality and dispossession.

IV Corruption and material power

Here we bring into conversation scholarship of a political-economic orientation that seeks to expose the inner workings of capitalism and the forms of sovereignty and governance that undergird material dispossession (i.e. of resources, capital, land, etc.). While this literature may not necessarily take a discursive or symbolic approach to corruption (or may not engage the word 'corruption' explicitly), it does bring a critical sensibility to corruption by emphasizing how kickbacks, fraud, and looting, among other acts, are intrinsic rather than aberrant to capitalist development. This work lays bare the exploitative acts that lie at the heart of the ordinary

functioning of capitalist development in order to understand how and when, if at all, these acts are politicized and policed as 'corruption'.

Foundational theories of primitive accumulation – what Marx called the 'original sin of simple robbery' of land and resource enclosures – position corruption as *integral* to the establishment of private property and markets. Most famously, in David Harvey's (2003) theory of accumulation by dispossession, corruption – framed as the use of extra-legal force and racketeering – is central to ongoing capital accumulation, especially in moments of crisis. Harvey is inspired here by Rosa Luxemburg and Hannah Arendt. Luxemburg writes of the organic linkages between market exchange and supposedly 'non-capitalist' modalities of 'colonial policy, an international loan system, [. . .] and war' where 'force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed' (Harvey, 2003: 137). Arendt similarly notes how key moments of economic crisis and imperialist expansion in the late 1800s were marked by an 'unparalleled increase in swindles, financial scandals, and gambling in stock markets' (Harvey, 2003: 146).

Though Harvey's wide-ranging writings do not fully theorize the use of so-called 'non-capitalist' coercive force and other extra-economic modalities of accumulation by dispossession (Levien, 2013), corruption may well be understood as a normal means to enable the release and commodification of resources for market exchange. It is in this sense that Robbins (2000: 431), discussing natural resource exploitation in India, notes that corruption often constitutes a form of 'accumulation by other means' undertaken not by 'weak states' as modernization theorists assumed, but by strong institutions. Corruption is in this view a systematic extralegal means for allocating resources that is deeply embedded in the state apparatus (Wade, 1982). Similarly, Le Billon (2003: 414), discussing natural resource exploitation in Africa, underscores corruption's 'endogenous

character' as 'part of the fabric of social and political relations'.

But why does such egregious economic behavior often *not* register as corruption in certain contexts? What formations of sovereignty render various forms of material exploitation *licit* rather than *illicit*? Joshua Barkan's (2013: 5) carefully historicized notion of 'corporate immunity' is useful in thinking through these perplexing questions. From export processing zones to extractive industries, Barkan argues that corporations seem to have been empowered in new ways to act with impunity across borders. Yet to see these actions merely as corporate 'abuse' – aberrations from an otherwise clean set of operations – would be to misread a long history in which political institutions have *always* been structured to put 'corporate economic interests over those of communities and the public at large' (Barkan, 2013: 4). This is what Barkan calls 'corporate immunity', the history of which he traces to the practice of liberal government from at least the 18th century, in which corporations were gifted exemptions from and through the law for governing towns, hospitals, and poor houses, among other institutions. Though not explicitly referencing corruption, his idea is useful for acknowledging that the formations of sovereignty we take for granted have always straddled state and market divides, and in this respect have, in one way or the other, always been 'abusive'.

The notion that public and private power have always bled into each other, and are in fact 'ontologically linked' (Barkan, 2013: 4) under liberal capitalism presents a challenge to mainstream views that posit corruption as 'the abuse of public power for private gain'. In the simplest of terms, ordinary capitalist development has *always* entailed abuses of power (Schneider and Schneider, 2005). In the extreme, take Blok's (1974) classic study of rural Sicily, where the 'mafia' – violent entrepreneurs with liminal positions who were lionized by the public – served as brokers between the state, landlords,

and peasants. Mafias used their power to appropriate land and emerge as a powerful class of property owners during Italy's transition to agrarian capitalism.

While mainstream economists might balk at the idea that mafias are instrumental to capitalist development in the West, consider a spate of millennial scandals in the US and Europe: the Enron collapse of 2001 and the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 being just two examples. In the Enron case, Shore (2003: 147) notes: 'today's fraudsters, who have robbed thousands of employees of their savings and pensions, were yesterday's heroes and celebrities [. . .] lionized on the covers of business magazines'. In the case of the subprime mortgage crisis, Elvin Wyly et al (2006) argue that predatory lenders were exonerated by conservatives as providing a public service because they extended credit to low-income households unable to secure prime credit. Yet, these same lenders deliberately targeted and deceived African American and other minority low-income borrowers, earning windfall profits when these households' interest rates ballooned and they lost their life savings; 'dispossession is *itself* a mechanism of accumulation in the subprime universe' (Strauss, 2009: 12). In both these cases, the law supported unethical business practices, suggesting a kind of 'totality' and normalcy of state and capital in accumulation and dispossession (Brittain-Catlin, 2006: 119).

If these studies demonstrate that malfeasances lie at the heart of ordinary western capitalism, and that blurred private and public rule undergird transgressions, it is ironic that the West has been pursuing 'anticorruption' reforms to clean house elsewhere. Herein lies the rub: what is normalized or even passes as virtuous in the West frequently gets politicized as 'corruption' in the non-West with adverse effects. Anthropologist Wedel's (2001) critical review of corruption in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc states comes to precisely this conclusion. After the end of the Cold War in the

1990s, western-assisted and World Bank privatization efforts dovetailed with anticorruption campaigns. In Russia, Wedel documents how 'flex organizations' were established to oversee economic reforms with backing from Harvard University and hundreds of millions of dollars of aid assistance. Charged with creating a clear separation between private and public spheres as called for by anticorruption proponents (an ironic demand given the history of western capitalism laid out by Barkan above), these flex organizations did anything but. To the contrary, flex organizations reinforced many of the informal networks ('clans'), organized crime syndicates, and other blurred forms of private and public sovereignty established under communism. In Wedel's (2001: 4) words:

> Under post-socialist transformations, much political-economic influence has accrued to those who skillfully blend, equivocate, mediate, and otherwise work the spheres of state and private, bureaucracy and market, and legal and illegal. Political-economic influence has resided precisely in the control of the interface between state and private. Many outcomes, such as the distribution and ownership of resources, have been shaped by struggles to steer the state-private nexus.

This quote brings home the importance of material and political-economic power in exploiting and controlling resources, what may well be vocalized as corruption in one instance and not the next. The discursive politics are thus important here. Wedel goes on to describe how flex organizations are particularly skilled at denying corruption because their roles and boundaries are fluid in the first place: "If the state is criticized, activities can be attributed to the clan. If the clan is criticized, activities can be attributed to the state. Deniability is institutionalized". The net result is a curious situation in which anticorruption reforms breed corruption, which is then denied as corruption by perpetrators. This is where it becomes

theoretically potent to bring material dimensions of power together with symbolic and discursive regimes in an analysis of corruption. Nefarious practices and the power to deny or justify complicity in those very practices are core to the work accomplished by corruption discourse.

Geographers Brown and Cloke (2011) make exactly this point in the context of the recent global economic crisis. They challenge policy silences on private sector misdeeds (which are rarely, if ever, referred to as 'corruption') as well as the hypocrisies of northern anticorruption efforts that promote economic doctrines that may perpetuate damaging forms of corruption. This double standard is not new: in the colonies, imperial capital maintained the image of clean and liberal government while reinforcing predatory regimes that were explained and justified through cultural-racial stereotypes of uncivilized 'traditional' societies (Mamdani, 1996; Watts, 2003). For instance, the 'principle of geographical morality' – the notion that moral decrepitude and arbitrary power was the norm among the 'black races' in the colonies – was deployed to protect and legitimate white colonial officials who blatantly engaged in bribe-taking while eliminating native bureaucratic staff in 18th-century colonial India (Ala'i, 2000). Officials that would have been prosecuted in Europe for corruption were exonerated in the colonies. Today, large or savvy global real estate corporations in India maintain the appearance of clean and transparent dealings while also circumventing regulations through partnerships with political brokers and fixers engaged in what is readily defined as corruption (Searle, 2016). Appel (2012: 451) similarly shows that ultra-modern US enclaves in Equatorial Guinea made possible by extractive petro-capitalism create 'a line between compliant and corrupt, American and African'. American oil abdicates responsibilities to host countries and elides its own complicity with corrupt regimes by manufacturing spectacular sites of global infrastructure.

Critical corruption studies are thus invaluable, argue Brown and Cloke (2011: 119), because 'they hold up a mirror to the technical experts doing the defining and aim right at the heart of how rich northern countries perceive themselves historically'. In this way, a focus on the material and political-economic dimensions of what is – or is not – deemed 'corrupt' complements an approach rooted in ethical discourse. This strategy exposes the fact that the mainstream corruption consensus is itself a type of pro-market discourse, one that obscures or condones certain forms of corruption in certain places while spotlighting others. Put differently, it may well be worthwhile to examine corruption in the very countries that Transparency International, via its infamous 'Corruption Perceptions Index', deems least corrupt (Haller and Shore, 2005).

The corruption literatures so far discussed provide a welcome challenge to mainstream theories. Yet further insights into the territorial logics of rule – and how these simultaneously implicate both symbolic and material struggles – are necessary to decipher the frontiers of corruption politics and, more specifically, the ways in which places and bodies become represented as corrupt or not. We turn next to theories of informal territorial rule that are highly relevant for a critical geography of corruption, showing how at a moment that global inequality has reached unprecedented levels, corruption has come to the fore as a powerful indictment of the abuses of entrusted power.

V Corruption and territorial power

We opened this article by suggesting that corruption's relationship to space and territorial power has been underemphasized in geography and cognate literatures. Yet corruption discourse has always implicated certain places, sites, and bodies as more or less corrupt depending on a range of social and historical dynamics. Broad readings of territory are present in

previous geographical inquiries into predatory governance, though not referred to explicitly as corruption (Blomley, 2016; Watts, 2003). Watts' (2004) seminal work challenges the deterministic 'resource curse' hypothesis (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler, 2005) – the idea that oil and other primary commodities inherently produce corruption and democratic erosion – by identifying the geopolitical configurations in which oil is embedded. Watts (2004: 50) usefully conceptualizes what he calls '(un)governable spaces', which tie together forms of sovereignty, spatial strategies, and different ethnic and national identities in the Niger Delta. Other studies show that space figures centrally in anticorruption struggles across the world, from the siphoning of agricultural land for energy and other valued crops (Borras et al., 2011) to the transformation of urban spaces for high-end real estate (Doshi and Ranganathan, 2017). These literatures on land and resource dispossession offer guidance in thinking through the 'inner workings of states' (Wolford et al., 2013: 195) and the differentiated subjectivities engendered (Casolo and Doshi, 2013; Doshi, 2013). Corruption discourse matters in these struggles; for instance, Madeleine Fairbairn (2013) demonstrates how local elites highlighted incidents of bribery in order to block foreign claims to land in Mozambique.

Yet in most geographic work on territorial rule and land and resource struggles, the contradictory politics of corruption discourses takes a back stage. Crucial questions have been neglected: How and when does the discourse of corruption become politicized to draw attention to or elide the territorializations of sovereignty and authority that drive wealth accumulation and dispossession and shape the possibilities of everyday life and livelihoods? How do diverse symbolic representations of space and place influence the territorial politics of corruption? In this section, we foreground the relationship between corruption discourse and territorial power. Studies on the experience of informality in southern cities – where territorial practices traversing the boundaries of legality are a common feature of everyday life – provide a useful lens into corruption politics under contemporary global capitalism.

Across the world, law is enacted, manipulated, or suspended by various agents to exert control over space in ways that may be coded as 'corrupt' or legitimate by diverse agents at different moments. Theories of informality provide insights in to such dynamics by examining the range of extra-legal transactions; unofficial practices of planning, zoning, and land-use governance; and unregistered forms of labor, housing, services, and social life throughout the world's city regions. Like Cold War modernization theory, early understandings of informality, which focused on slums, street vending, and petty commodity production of the urban poor in Third World cities, viewed it as a temporary holdover of traditional societies. By contrast, Marxist scholars (particularly working on Latin America) saw so-called informal work as structurally connected to the formal sector. They challenged the dualism of sectoral approaches that assumed informality was economically and culturally marginal to modern capitalism (Perlman, 1979), instead positing informal production as a hyper-exploitative labor regime for capitalist markets (Portes, 1983). Informal housing and services were likewise seen as a central arena of state patronage and populist mobilization (Castells, 1983).

Since 2000, scholars have reworked these general lines of debate to engage the relationship between global capitalism and informality. Informality is *the* modus through which most urban dwellers access housing and resources – it is, in other words, a 'normal' practice of urban politics and political economy. In postcolonial democracies like India's, as Chatterjee (2011) famously claims, the 'illegal' propertyless urban poor must negotiate the illiberal domain of 'political society' (e.g. electoral politics and petty bribes) to access governmental welfare.

Meanwhile urbanists of the Middle East see squatting as kind of 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' (Bayat, 2000) where space is claimed surreptitiously through bribes and unauthorized settlement (Alsayyad, 2004) in the context of global economic precarity and austerity. Diverse camps posit informality as a space of inventive citizenship (Holston, 2008; Miraftab, 2009) and democratic association (Appadurai, 2001; Simone, 2004). This work suggests that informality is not exceptional, but rather the everyday practice of urban life and economy.

Yet recent studies also demonstrate that informality is not only or even primarily the domain of the poor and lower levels of the state. It is now evident that high-end malls, gated luxury complexes, government buildings, and corporate offices in India (Datta, 2016; Ghertner, 2015), Bangladesh (Yardley, 2013), and Mexico (Mueller, 2014; Varley, 2013) often start out just as 'illegal' as slums. Through practices that Yiftachel (2009) calls 'whitening', privileged classes and ethno-racial groups enjoy impunity and *ex post* legalization of their unauthorized structures and land encroachments while the less powerful live under constant threat of the bulldozer, as in the Beersheba metropolitan areas of Israel/Palestine. Such studies demonstrate how informality is implicated in logics of representing, organizing, and governing urban territory in highly unequal ways.

A brief note on conceptualizations of territory and territoriality will situate and distinguish the salient theories of informality for critical corruption geography. Anssi Paasi (2008) offers an understanding of territories as open-ended social processes rather than fixed frameworks, and of territoriality as the application of power over an area (often, though not exclusively, by states), through categorization of people and things, demarcation of boundaries, and reinforcing symbols and ideologies and the deployment of force. In a similar vein, Elden (2010: 806) draws on Lefebvre and Foucault to further argue that while attention to the political

economy and materiality of land as 'both the site and stake of struggle' is essential to understandings of territory, it nonetheless remains insufficient. He asserts rather that territory 'is a rendering of the emergent concept of "space" as a political category: owned, distributed, mapped, calculated, bordered and controlled' (2010: 810). In other words, territory comes to the fore through symbolic representational practices that enable and orient intervention. Perhaps because such meta-theories of territory are rooted in continental philosophy and European history, they have focused technologies of visibilization, calculation, and law. Yet what distinguishes informality as a form of territorial rule is the substantial discretion, ambiguity, and negotiability over each of these practices, which we argue makes them ripe for highly malleable indictments of corruption.

To date, Ananya Roy (2009b: 81) has provided the most thoroughgoing theorization of informality as a flexible territorial logic of accumulation, resource allocation, and authority in urban contexts. Roy's argument rests on the distinction between 'unregulated' and 'deregulated' regimes that rely on processes of 'unmapping' rather than technologies of visibility. Whereas unregulated systems connote haphazardness and the absence of the state, deregulation emphasizes how spatial ambiguity and legal and discursive malleability are deployed and negotiated by various agents, particularly by the state. Informality, Roy (2009b: 80) argues, is 'a state of deregulation, one where the ownership, use, and purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed regulations or the law'. Indeed, here the law itself is rendered open-ended and subject to multiple interpretations and interests. This means that, in one instance, certain forms of spatial intervention may entail accommodating (and thus garnering support from) lower income groups through legal exceptions such as slum regularization, street vending exemptions, and resettlement. In another, however, it may mean

deploying the rule of law to police, evict, and make room for elite projects that themselves advance through informal means (Gururani, 2013).

Critical informality studies demonstrate how zoning laws are broken, papers are forged, and official wheels are greased in the context of foreign direct investment, sleek architectural plans, and formal property rights (Searle, 2014). Licit and illicit practices are thus co-deployed. Illegal territorial interventions undertaken by and benefiting the powerful are often legalized through processes that the Comaroffs (2006) have called 'lawfare', or the legitimization of spatial acts though law, akin to Yiftachel's concept of 'whitening' discussed above. We see such practices at play in special economic zones and new spaces of consumption, residence, business, and leisure in cities of the Global South, where 'corporate immunity' is on full display. A range of 'informal sovereigns' (Hansen and Stepputat, 2006) including mafia dons (Weinstein, 2008), gangs (Garmany, 2014), and other local strongmen govern extra-state spaces of rule and development across the city. Such 'ethics of illegality' serve as common ground across state and non-state actors (Roitman, 2005). In sum, informal territorial rule by a range of actors enables the carving up of space through the law and its exceptions.

This is where the politics of corruption – as a moral and subjective indictment of informal territorial rule – becomes crucial. Because informality does not simply denote the extra-legal but also the flexible deployment of law and regulations, it becomes ripe for political contestations and claims-making which often mobilize the language of corruption. As mentioned at the outset, the informalized urban poor have long been criminalized and denigrated as 'corrupt' by upper classes and elites across urban contexts (Björkman, 2014; Hunt, 2009). This is especially evident in the precarity and punishment endured by informal street vendors across northern and southern cities (recall the killing of Eric Garner in New York by police who stopped him for selling single cigarettes). Yet notions of the betrayal of the public and criminality may be retooled by such groups through corruption talk and anti-corruption mobilization (Anjaria, 2009). It is salient that Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, who had been harassed by 'corrupt' policemen asking for bribes in exchange for allowing his illegal livelihood, launched the Arab Spring revolt with his self-immolation. Bouazizi's act exceeded the simple indictment of low-level police corruption; Bouazizi became a lightning rod for channeling the frustrations of citizens across the region who felt betrayed by elite leaders enriching themselves while imposing harsh neoliberal austerity and western-backed militarized regimes that squeezed and displaced the poor and left few prospects for a better life for the majority (Hourani, 2014; Ismail, 2011). The Arab Spring uprising provides a case in point that shows how urban territorial rule and struggle becomes discursively mapped on to national, regional, and transnational spatial imaginaries and 'corruption' serves as the language to express the diverse discontents of the public.

Informal territoriality in urban real estate is another arena that is especially susceptible to corruption politics. Because developers are allowed to usurp land through a range of in/formal practices with relative impunity while the poor are policed – and that the material and territorial stakes of doing so are so high – explains why corruption has become such an embattled terrain of discursive and political struggle. Our own recent research on urban land grabs in India illustrates how the distinct melding of state and private sovereignty involved in capitalist accumulation and dispossession is politicized and contested through corruption narratives (Doshi and Ranganathan, 2017). Throughout Indian cities, favors granted to private developers by the state have become institutionalized through special parastatal vehicles

that 'fast track' building permits and infrastructural clearances for legally questionable high-end developments, while penalizing the settlements of the poor (Ranganathan, 2015). Yet such territories are also contested. In Mumbai, for instance, activists and slum dwellers are leveraging anticorruption platforms and tools to uncover flexible state territorial practices, and thereby seek redress for dispossession in slum redevelopment projects aimed at unleashing land for housing and commercial projects. In addition to exposing myriad developer manipulations, these groups have challenged the immoral (though not always illegal) privileging of real estate profits over the life capacities of the urban poor (Doshi and Ranganathan, 2017). Perhaps the long history of colonial and development intervention foregrounding corruption discussed above, and the fact that corruption is so often deployed as an everyday diagnostic of the state, as Gupta's work shows, explain how this term has been effectively appropriated by the dispossessed in the current moment. Attention to corruption politics reveals how a range of informal territorial practices are indicted ethically, and when and how informal practices become politicized as corruption.

Though we have focused on the postcolonial city, the connections between territorial power and talk of corruption apply well beyond this context, namely in global real estate markets. A report entitled 'Doors Wide Open: Corruption and Real Estate in Four Key Markets' by none other than Transparency International (who, subject to intense critique, has of late begun to focus on western-assisted and private sector corruption) examines money laundering by wealthy politicians and businessmen in real estate in London, New York, and Vancouver, among other cities. The report admits that, unconstrained by weak or absent laws, real estate 'gatekeepers' in these cities 'may act as enablers for corrupt officials wanting to acquire property using illegal money'. The report cites a seven-part expose titled 'Towers of Secrecy' by the New York Times, in which journalists Story and Saul (2015) reveal that New York's luxury condominiums are used to park the fortunes of typically corrupt wealthy politicians and businessmen via 'shell companies', businesses and trusts that shield their names. Again, the authors point to the willful exploitation of loopholes by the US real estate sector and federal government efforts to bend real estate regulation as major reasons why the sector is flush with corrupt money. In other words, the alleged corruption runs both ways. The point here is that in a world in which the astounding wealth of the '1%' is a matter of major public concern – and much of it is amassed through real estate – the ethical frame of corruption has been applied more imaginatively by activists, the media, and non-profit watchdogs than in the past, offering new openings for laying bare the injustices of late capitalism.

The cases of urban land and livelihood struggles allow us to reflect on how corruption discourse is shaped by and shapes all three dimensions of power, namely symbolic, material, and territorial power. Corruption is being politicized and symbolized in cities at a moment of deepening inequality precisely because of the enormous material and territorial stakes at hand – space is a frontier of capitalist profit, after all. Corruption serves as an ethical language for making sense of the blurred configurations of sovereignty – developer-banker-bureaucracy-politician nexuses, for instance – that undergird material and territorial dispossession. Finally, corruption talk morally (re)assesses actions that traverse a spectrum of informal territorial practices indicting elite and poor groups alike. At a time when inequality has seemingly reached unprecedented levels, corruption has become a multivalent moral barometer to parse out informal spatial practices that are ethically defensible from those seen as unethical. Practices of corporate immunity and state collusion have become politicized as corruption in the

contemporary period. Corruption discourse is supple and parasitically attaches to politico-spatial projects in ways that geographers would do well to pay attention to.

VI Conclusion

Our goal in this paper was to engage corruption as a serious object of critical geographic inquiry. Geography is uniquely positioned to explore the meaning-making practices and concrete material and territorial stakes underlying allegations of and practices related to corruption. We proposed a framework for studying the politics of corruption, which we defined as a shifting and subjective discourse that is used to critique the abuse of entrusted power.

In proposing such a framework, we argued against the dominant assumption that corruption comprises a fixed and measurable set of practices, such as bribery and nepotism – an assumption made in both early modernization and post-Cold War neoliberal readings of corruption. Instead, we suggested that corruption is an ever-changing evaluative frame used to indict various configurations and abuses of entrusted power. Corruption discourse is used opportunistically, sometimes to call attention to egregious practices deemed to be a deviation from an 'uncorrupted' norm. At other times, it is conspicuously absent even when those practices in question involve fraud, buying influence, and other forms of exploiting the public, as is often the case in the Global North. Crucially, the literature demonstrates that there is no clear-cut equivalency between illegality, immorality, and corruption. What is illegal is not always seen nor narrated as immoral or corrupt. On the other hand, what has long been codified as legal may suddenly be designated as immoral and corrupt when the global economy collapses and the tide of public opinion shifts. As such, we contend that it is crucial for critical research to ask the question of how, why, and when corruption gets politicized

(rather than defining corruption a priori), and to what end. Here political-economic dynamics matter for how the discursive formations of corruption take shape and get mobilized, but they do not determine singularly.

We have tried to provide some insight into how a critical geographic research agenda can do this. Drawing on human geographical and cognate literatures, our framework suggests that corruption discourse is yoked to three interrelated aspects of power – symbolic, material, and territorial. When yoked to symbolic power, corruption talk serves as a meaning system to imagine the state, the public, and their blurred boundaries. It can also serve to absolve one's own complicity in nefarious acts, while calling out the corruption of others. In this way, corruption discourse must always be read for its deeper metaphors and tropes of stigmatization and scapegoating.

When yoked to material power, we are presented with a challenge, since processes under capitalism that usurp and concentrate wealth, land, and resources are not always called out as 'corruption' and are instead regarded as normal to a capitalist political economy. Whether or not predatory acts, such as defrauding low-income homeowners, or using corporate wealth to buy public policy (as in the US Citizens United decision), or channeling anticorruption funding for political rent-seeking, are framed as corruption or not depends on, among other things, the magnitude of resources exploited, historical geopolitical relations, and the political tenor of the moment. Post-2008 global financial meltdown, for instance, bankers and real estate brokers may well be more likely to be exposed as immoral and corrupt. In short, the very fact that materially and territorially exploitative practices *may* or *may not* be called corruption is in and of itself a puzzle worthy of critical geographic attention.

Finally and relatedly, when yoked to territorial power (which, in turn, is necessarily connected to symbolic and material power), we

see that corruption politics in late capitalism is increasingly rooted in space and representations of space. The literature on urban informality allows us to understand the nature of flexible territorial governance – how, for instance, the dubiously legal spatial practices of the elite can proceed with impunity while those of the poor are policed as corruption. We also see that at a moment of deepening inequality, this script may be flipped: the longstanding misdemeanors of the landed elite, politicians, developers, and planning bureaucracy are being indicted as corruption, even if they are not always in contravention of the law (in fact, the law may abet nefarious real estate practices). Through the deployment of corruption talk, ordinary people establish an evaluative frame that challenges and redirects elite discourses and practices. This manipulability of corruption is significant to core geographical concerns. At a time when spatial, economic, and ethno-racial inequality has seemingly reached unprecedented levels, corruption has become a supple moral barometer to parse out ethically defensible irregularities from those seen as unethical.

We must remember, however, that progressive strains of corruption discourse must not be romanticized, for they are always in tension with discourses that seek to root out corruption through market-oriented reforms or age-old stigmas that criminalize the lower classes and marginalized race, caste, and ethnic groups. In global cities from Mumbai to Manila and from to Rio to Istanbul, corruption charges continue to target and punish the informal spatial practices of the poor and less powerful (such as street vendors and slum dwellers) through a politics of representation steeped in coded discourses of criminality. In brief, corruption politics matters, but to understand how requires careful attention to the effects of socio-spatial power that human geography perspectives are especially poised to decipher.

We conclude by suggesting that the politics of populism and authoritarianism provide a ripe arena for the application of a critical geography of corruption. We do not have to look far to see that the language of populism is deeply inflected with corruption politics. Recently, both left and right-wing political movements around the world have mobilized diverse constituents by tapping into feelings of injustice and distrust of corrupt politicians and processes. Through articulation with economic and ethno-racial populism, corruption discourse has served to both lambaste elites as well as to scapegoat marginalized racial and ethno-religious groups including Kurds in Erdogan's Turkey, Muslims and *dalits* in Modi's India, people of African descent in Brazil post the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and immigrants and Muslims in Trump's US, post-Brexit UK, and across Europe.

The recent US elections provide a telling example of how corruption discourse fuels populist rhetoric of the nation, the public, and social decay, and mobilizes social and economic discontent towards differently constituted 'enemies'. The Trump campaign repeatedly made reference to the economic and political system being 'rigged' and called for 'draining the swamp' – the latter being a metonym for Washington, DC's establishment politics. The campaign usurped, leveraged, and redirected the corruption discourse of Bernie Sanders' socialist platform which focused on reforming corporate campaign finance and breaking up large banks. But what became increasingly clear was the degree to which the Trump campaign successfully fused white nationalist and xenophobic sentiments with (often sexist) anti-Clinton ire to forge its own version of anticorruption discourse. We have argued elsewhere that Trump's anticorruption talk implicitly leverages white anxieties (Ranganathan and Doshi, 2017). Trumpian populism, like other variants around the world, maps certain publics as pure and naturally belonging to the imagined territory of the nation while marking others (Muslims, Latino/a immigrants, African-Americans) as criminal,

deviant, or needing to be expelled. Here corruption discourse is critical to the populist sorting out of who is the legitimate public and how it is harmed. This is why Trump can successfully claim to fight a corrupt establishment perceived to cater to racial minorities, the problem of non-American 'illegal voters', and crime-infested 'burning' inner cities in the face of his own myriad conflicts of interest, especially in the real estate sector. All the while, this narrative of corruption upholds the rural and post-industrial heartland as the territorially marked white public to be avenged and protected.

Around the world, corruption discourse often bolsters masculinist authority figures seen as the only effective strongman choice for 'cleaning up' corrupt establishments, which again often serves as code for ethno-racial minorities and working classes. On the same day that Trump won the US presidency, Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, announced a systematic 'demonetization' of India's economy to fight corruption. Overnight, the country's citizens had to relinquish Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 bills because these were seen to be driving India's 'black money' economy – or the substantial cash that flows untaxed and unaccounted for by the government. Despite Modi's populist appeal to working and middle-class grievances, many commentators have noted that the move to demonetize has in fact demonized India's informal economy and the lower-caste and lower- and lower-middle income groups that rely on it.

Upon close examination, the anticorruption story that Modi spun was also steeped in color and identity-based metaphors. For instance, for Ilaiah (*The Caravan*, 2016), a political scientist and activist for Dalit rights: 'a white Modi has made the people black, not the money'. He goes on to explain why this statement is both metaphorical and literal. Modi's party has long been influenced by a far-right Hindu nationalist agenda that seeks to 'make India Hindu again' in the sense of purifying the country from Muslim, western, and other non-Hindu influences.

But the activist also means this statement in a literal sense: 'the masses who are standing in the long queues for changing a note of Rs 500, having worked all their life in the hot sun, are black', referring to workers at the lowest rungs of India's color-coded caste system. By targeting 'black money', Modi simultaneously redirected the spotlight away from India's nefarious high-end money laundering and state-business nexus, including its legal 'white money' appropriations of slum and agricultural land, rewriting of zoning and other laws to benefit industrial interests, and watering down of environmental regulations to lure private capital. Instead, the state moved to punish the quotidian 'black' transactions that provide the lifeblood of so many of its non-elite citizens, especially those engaged in the informal economy. Modi and his advisors have crafted a good story to justify the move, but the full repercussions of their massive policy change are yet to be known.

In the study of corruption talk and populism, all three dimensions of power are significant. Corruption politics is critical to the ways that everyday populations come to symbolize, imagine, and critique experiences of exploitation, neglect, and economic decline, in turn seized upon by populist figures. Corruption politics also hinges on selectively effacing and making visible material and extractive relationships. Finally, corruption politics reinforce unequal and exclusionary territories of rule, while also holding emancipatory potential to challenge multi-sited collusions of power. Corruption politics ultimately plays a central role in the everyday life and struggles of advanced capitalism and deserves adequate attention in human geography. We hope this paper provides a useful set of theoretical pathways for expanding geographic research on corruption.

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