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The European Union and neoliberal governmentality: Twinning in Tunisia and Egypt

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Abstract

As a response to the Arab uprisings that started in 2010, the European Union has emphasised, more determined than ever, the urgency of inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development in the Arab region. The central objective of this article is to understand the nature and operation of European Union support for development following Arab mass movements. More specifically, it examines the European Union's Twinning instrument in Egypt and Tunisia through a neoliberal governmentality framework, with a major focus on visualisations, technologies and subject formation. This approach enables us to observe the application of an agenda through which Twinning intervenes into non-economic domains of governance in the target countries and aims at shaping these spheres by economic rationalities and techniques. By constructing change around local governance capabilities, the Twinning programme acts upon individual skills, institutional arrangements and relationships, deploys benchmarking techniques, and empowers subjects and government behaviour in order to bring conduct to certain economic logics and exercises. The outcome is the rendering of Tunisian and Egyptian socio-economic development open to enterprise-based, calculative and professionalised operations that make local conditions serviceable to neoliberal governing patterns, linkages and practices of business, capital production and investment.

Keywords

Arab uprisings, development support, European Union, Michel Foucault, neoliberal governmentality, North Africa

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Introduction

The Arab uprisings and subsequent political developments in the Arab world have indicated the need for a critical reconsideration of European Union (EU) relations with the region. The EU's immediate response to the events came with the declaration of 'A partnership for democracy and shared prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean', published in March 2011 (European Commission, 2011a), followed by a Joint Communication called 'A new response to a changing neighbourhood' (European Commission, 2011b). The Partnership sets out three central objectives guiding EU policies to the region: democracy and institution-building; civil society promotion and people-to-people exchanges; and inclusive economic growth and development (European Commission, 2011a: 2). What is common to these goals is that the EU underlines 'development' as a central element of change in the Arab countries¹ and declares its determination to support socio-economic development in the region. The objective, as the EU suggests, is to support inclusive economic growth and enable locally sensitive and sustainable development (European Commission, 2011a, 2011d, 2013a).

How can we account for the EU's promotion of socio-economic development in Arab countries after 2011? I address this question by relying on Michel Foucault's concept of 'neoliberal governmentality' (Foucault, 2008, 2009). Neoliberal governmentality, as understood by Foucault, concerns decentralised and dispersed practices that permeate the social, political and legal structures of a given society through economic rationalities and technologies (Joseph, 2009; Kurki, 2011; Walters, 2012). I examine Foucault's insights into neoliberal governmentality through a three-step analysis informed by Mitchell Dean's 'analytics of government', with a particular attention to visualisations, technologies and subjects that constitute governmentality (Dean, 2008: 20–39). In particular, I focus on the EU's Twinning instrument in Egypt and Tunisia. Twinning operates under the European Neighbourhood Policy as a tool for project-based institution-building cooperation between relevant public bodies of EU member states and their counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia so that the latter foster their technical, administrative and judicial capacities to implement European Neighbourhood Policy objectives. I contend that Twinning practices are illustrative of a neoliberal governmentality agenda with which the EU aspires to circulate market principles and logics into the minds, choices, habits and actions of individuals and public institutions across a broad array of issues regulating Tunisian and Egyptian society.

Tunisia and Egypt are relevant cases for investigating EU development promotion. These two countries have been primary targets of EU external development programmes in the Southern Mediterranean and still remain key recipients of EU technical and economic assistance in the region in the aftermath of the uprisings. Financial data on the allocation of EU funds confirm the primacy of the two countries in EU support for development and economic growth in North Africa. When Arab uprisings started, the EU immediately doubled its assistance to Tunisia with a budget (2011–2013) reaching an amount of €400 million to assist economic recovery, civil society support and political transition, while new packages were launched and additional funds were approved to strengthen Egyptian social, economic and political infrastructure to facilitate transition (European Commission, 2011e, 2013b). Similarly, Tunisia and Egypt are among the top

beneficiaries of the Twinning instrument, with a high number of projects that have been completed and are still operating and in the pipeline. Twinning is a relevant case to investigate the EU's approach to development. With a wide spectrum of projects addressing health, education, research, employment, energy and public administration, the Twinning programme is intimately related to socio-economic development in the partner countries. Furthermore, Twinning is an important case to examine from the perspective of governmentality. It is interesting to ask what rationalities and technologies underlie an instrument that is argued to be 'built around jointly agreed policy objectives' identified by the EU and the beneficiary country (European Commission, 2012: 11). Each project is said to be 'demand-driven' (Bouscharain and Moreau, 2012: 152), and 'the Twinning project idea derives from actual need' (European Commission, 2012: 12). Is Twinning, in its practical application, context-sensitive, with policy visions and strategies reflecting the local expectations and needs? Do individual projects affirm that Twinning exercises are 'well adapted to the local context' (Bouscharain and Moreau, 2012: 46), indicating locally sensitive action in EU policy towards socio-economic development in Tunisia and Egypt?

The argument that the EU pursues neoliberal goals in the Arab world is not new. A number of studies have indicated the primacy of economic considerations in EU bilateral and regional exchanges with the Arab countries, such as trade relations and energy exports from the region (Hollis, 2012; Mettwally, 2004; Wood, 2009). The EU is said to have supported authoritarian regimes to secure its neoliberal economic interests and cooperated with market-oriented civil society actors to expand the scope of its economic activities (MacKenzie et al., 2013; Seeborg, 2009). It has also been noted how EU economic development policies through investment, business and aid provision have intensified imbalanced economic and trade relations between EU member states and Arab countries and created an asymmetric dependency to the detriment of the latter (Attinà, 2003; Dodini and Fantini, 2006).

It is also important to note that the EU is not the only actor promoting a neoliberal agenda in the region. Neoliberalism in Tunisia and Egypt has deep roots, with a complex network of interaction between domestic actors and various international and transnational actors (Mitchell, 2002; Tagma et al., 2013). The US, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations and its agencies have been strong supporters and financiers of neoliberal policies and economic adjustment programmes implemented by Tunisian and Egyptian governments since the 1980s. They have played a significant role in entrenching market liberalisation processes in the two countries by making their aid, credit and loan programmes conditional upon neoliberal adjustment programmes and reform measures (Cavatorta and Haugbølle, 2012; Kandil, 2012). Therefore, an interesting question is: how does the Twinning instrument contribute to the transnational dimension of neoliberalism in Egypt and Tunisia?

Neoliberalism in the Egyptian and Tunisian context has been examined from Foucault-inspired neoliberal governmentality approaches. Mitchell (1998, 2002) has concentrated on the power of expertise in creating a 'reality' about the Egyptian economy in relation to modern capitalism through statistics and other calculative technologies. Tagma et al. (2013) have examined EU engagement with Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings by pointing to the EU's attempt at subject formation through civil society support. The contribution

of my study to the debates on neoliberalism in the Middle East in general and EU involvement in the region in particular is to shed light on how Twinning renders the non-economic into the economic by promoting economic rationalities and techniques in societal issues that, by essence, exist outside the market. I contend that the Twinning instrument promotes neoliberal principles of rational conduct, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and risk management in unconventional ways by linking these ideas to new spaces of governance, such as education, research, energy and health. In that way, the Foucauldian approach enables us to observe the increasing association of broader segments of the domestic sphere with market processes. Having said that, the question is not how *effective* Twinning as an art of neoliberal governmentality is. Just as the governmentality of health does not result in the eradication of all diseases and health risks in a given population, but still governs from a distance by subjecting individuals to a set of rationalities and techniques administering risk management, health insurance schemes and self-responsibility (Foucault, 2009), so the Twinning instrument has *effects* that go beyond its agenda, and these *effects* come out in the act of visibility, technologies and subject formation. The following analysis demonstrates that imaginations, calculative techniques and subject promotion have broader implications as to how socio-economic development is being understood. It also points at what power effects the ‘non-ideological’ and ‘locally sensitive’ Twinning instrument has in terms of domestic politics and international economic processes.

Neoliberal governmentality

Foucault defines governmentality as the conduct of individual action and aspects of managing the wider society (Foucault, 1983). The concept of governmentality was put forward by Foucault during his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s (Foucault, 2008, 2009). Governmentality is a specific form of power that concerns the management of conduct ‘from a distance’ (Joseph, 2009: 415). It operates in diffuse and decentralised ways through tactics, instruments and processes, with powerful and productive effects on ideas, visions, calculations, decisions, institutions and relationships (Gane, 2012; Walters, 2012). Therefore, the governmentality framework shifts analysis from centralised state apparatuses to investigate the conduct of behaviour within ‘dispersed, heteromorphous, localised procedures of power’ (Foucault, 1980: 142).

Neoliberal governmentality rests on interventions into the social for the ‘active creation of the historical and social conditions for the market’ (Lemke, 2001: 195). Neoliberalism differs from classical liberalism in its understanding of the economy and the principles of freedom, competition and exchange belonging to market exchanges. Under classical liberalism, the market is seen ‘as part of the natural order of things’, inhabited by rational and free human beings that compete autonomously for the exchange of capital and commodities and capital accumulation. The task of government is to respect the natural laws and autonomous interactions of the market and refrain from interfering directly into ‘the rational conduct of individuals’ (Fouger, 2008: 308). Neoliberalism is based on an ‘anti-naturalistic conception of the market and of the principle of competition’, whereby rational individuals and freedom no longer stand for a ‘natural’ fact (Lemke, 2001: 193). The economy and its subjects are to be created and

constantly fostered, and this requires strategic and determinate political, social and legal arrangements to forge the sort of social framework desired by the market (Vrasti, 2013). Freedom, including the freedom of individuals, is still the guiding principle of the market. Yet, rather than being a natural reality, freedom is 'a social construct' that is to be worked upon and reinforced to create the right kind of economic individuals and rules of competition in market exchanges (Joseph, 2010: 227). Neoliberal governmentality, then, utilises freedom and competition and strives to shape the nature and ways of their exercise with the aim of producing the sort of values, linkages, habits and practices serviceable to market logics and needs (Fouger, 2008; Kurki, 2011).

The neoliberal system of governmentality is guided by 'the logic of enterprise'. It manifests the diffusion of the values pertaining to the market into non-economic fields of life. The market principles of 'competition, initiative, risk-taking and prudence' increasingly regulate how individuals view themselves, their relationships with others and their position in relation to the economy and the state. The enterprise society is one that is populated by 'self-regulating' and 'enterprising' individuals who make use of their individual qualities and abilities, benefit from resources offered to them, make cost-benefit calculations in their decisions, and take individual responsibility for their own failures and actions (Joseph, 2010: 228). With individuals bearing the responsibility for their employment, poverty, health and so on (Brenner et al., 2010), neoliberalism assembles its energies 'to promote social and moral orders conducive to entrepreneurial conduct' through indirect regulatory and legal measures of control and guidance that 'disseminate the necessary rights and freedoms for individuals to give their lives an entrepreneurial shape' in accordance with the wishes and requirements of the market (Vrasti, 2013: 60). Here, 'local ownership' proves a critical element that takes the form of giving individuals and local networks certain aspects of power and incorporating them into governance processes (Kurki, 2011: 353) in the area of, for instance, security (Joseph, 2009) and socio-economic development (Mullings, 2012). Neoliberalism is the encouragement of local ownership by investing in the skills of local planners, experts and governors and proliferating their resources, spaces and linkages to play a part in governance matters. The empowerment of entrepreneurial selves is, however, a governmental strategy that promotes ideas and behaviour in ways that profit the market, and helps strengthen the political rule backing that economic order (Joronen, 2013).

Thus, neoliberal governmentality entails the extension of forms of rule and management that impose particular calculative, regulative and conceptual standards, guidelines and indicators in shaping, categorising, valuing and differentiating visions, solutions and practices. The governmentality concern for advancing competitiveness, self-management and entrepreneurship goes hand in hand with particular visualisations, problematisation strategies and types of knowledge and expands techniques of administration and control that are in tension with neoliberal claims of inclusion, emancipation and empowerment (Brenner et al., 2010; Walters, 2012). Such procedures apply to both individuals and states vis-a-vis the market. Making individuals self-responsible for risks and benefits obliges them to acquire capacities and expertise-driven qualities to increase their market value and their chances to get a better share of economic opportunities and governance processes (Mullings, 2012). However, the association of the proper kind of rational economic subject not only results in the ruling out of people unable to coincide

with market logics, but also has the effect of depoliticisation by dismissing alternative economic models and making structural factors of poverty, risk, illiteracy and illness invisible through its overemphasis on individual responsibilities (Munro, 2012; Vrasti, 2013). Similarly, citizen participation in governance procedures and local ownership makes 'the pluralisation of demands' possible, yet the sorts of rationalities, calculations and assessment techniques tied to such 'collaborative and consensus-seeking stakeholder arrangements' curtail the efforts of 'their translation into universalising demands that cannot be accommodated for in the current social order' (Haughton et al., 2013: 222).

Neoliberalism also generates a change in the tactics, techniques and procedures of government, which is no longer driven by Keynesianism and welfare concerns, but takes the market as its organising principle and comes to be increasingly concerned with selling the self to domestic and transnational economic interests. It promotes self-governing and entrepreneurial subjects by providing the social, political and legal framework to optimise individual and collective conduct so individuals meet expectations as to production and productivity (Joseph, 2009). Such empowerment acts are linked to indirect means of regulation and performance evaluation whereby a government develops into an 'enterprise whose task is to universalize competition and invent market-shaped systems of action' through quantifiable instruments, such as benchmarks, indicators, assessment criteria and grading skills, qualities and actions (Lemke, 2001: 197). Besides being calculating subjects under neoliberal governmentality, governments are also calculable objects by being turned into 'flexible and manipulable market subjects' subjected to market instruments of benchmarking and indexing that rank countries in terms of their 'national competitiveness' in the search for 'mobile' capital, investment and companies (Fouger, 2008: 312).

On the basis of the Foucauldian neoliberal governmentality framework, the approach adopted here is built upon the three elements of Dean's (2008: 20–39) 'analytics of government'. Dean's methodology is a central framework of analysis in studies drawing upon the concept of governmentality (e.g. Death, 2013; Methmann, 2013) and enables us to apply the core ideas of Foucault to the examination of the case study under scrutiny. The first aspect of Dean's analytics of government concerns the 'fields of visibility', which focuses on the visualisation of government through reports, maps and spatial and temporal arrangements that illuminate certain themes, objects, subjects and their linkages, while concealing alternative visions, relationships and practices. The second aspect is the 'technical aspect of government', which encompasses a set of power technologies, routine techniques, daily instruments, strategic tools and tangible means of imaging, calculating and executing governmentality (Dean, 2008: 31). The third aspect concerns 'the formation of subjects, selves, persons, actors and agents' (Dean, 2008: 32) by means of defining tasks and subject positions and the constitution of subjects through technologies that invest in, empower and link individuals at the national, local and transnational levels according to particular government perceptions and aspirations.

Neoliberal governmentality and the Twinning instrument

Twinning was launched in 1998 upon the European Commission's initiative. It was designed as a technical instrument of administrative cooperation between the EU and

countries preparing to become a member of the EU. Although maintaining its original purpose, the Twinning programme has gone beyond the pre-accession process to include the neighbouring countries of the EU. Tunisia and Egypt are part of the Southern Mediterranean dimension of Twinning as partners of the European Neighbourhood Policy that started in 2004. EU relations with Tunisia and Egypt under the Neighbourhood Policy are regulated by the so-called Association Agreements, and the Twinning instrument assists the practical implementation of these agreements in the area of institution-building through cooperation between the public institutions of EU member states and beneficiary countries so that the latter align their legislation and administrative practices with those of the EU. These activities take place in the form of joint projects by one EU member state and the beneficiary country (European Commission, 2012). Twinning projects in Tunisia and Egypt cover a variety of topics, ranging from water management, competition, auditing and environment to health, education and justice. In 2013, the number of Twinning projects in operation in Tunisia was 16, making the country a major beneficiary of the instrument in the Southern Mediterranean. In 2013, there were four EU–Egypt Twinning projects running in the field of taxation and consumer protection, whereas two projects focused on education and training (European Commission, 2014b).

In the following, I apply Dean's analytics of government to examine how the Twinning instrument functions. Particularly, I focus on the sort of visualisations and techniques that individual Twinning projects inhabit and the kind of subjects they construct and empower. The analysis is based on a variety of primary sources, including country strategy papers, Twinning manuals, annual reports, project fiches, calls for proposals, news releases and evaluation reports, along with European Commission documents on the Southern Mediterranean and the Arab Spring in general and on Tunisia and Egypt in particular. To complement this analysis, I also rely on secondary literature to provide a broader contextual basis to understand EU engagement with the region. The three elements of Dean's analytics of government enable us to observe how Twinning diffuses into Tunisian and Egyptian domestic politics and strives to govern, in a neoliberal fashion, a variety of issues that traditionally belong to the non-economic sphere.

Envisaging change through development capacity

The EU pictures change in Egypt and Tunisia primarily as a matter of building capacities for socio-economic development. This field of visibility is enabled through the framing of the 'local' as a problem sphere in relation to economic and social growth. It is under the rubric of local capacities that poverty, social inequalities and unemployment are made intelligible, and civilian uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia are linked with socio-economic underdevelopment characterised by a weak connection of the local with the international economic order. Accordingly, the local bears the key responsibility for chronic and protracted conditions of underdevelopment in Egypt and Tunisia. Unemployment is seen to be the outcome of the fragile physical infrastructure and regulatory framework failing to attract domestic and foreign investment. Economic growth prospects are argued to be hampered by technical regulations at the local level that present obstacles to trade. The scarce institutional skills and unsatisfactory performance of law-enforcement authorities in fighting against corruption and organised crime undermine prospects for

capital flow for job creation and constitute serious barriers to competition in regional and international trade (European Commission, 2014a). Education and vocational training hardly provide the youth with workforce skills and personal capacities in employment matters. Coupled with inadequate political and institution-building reforms to strengthen the material basis and human capital in the economic sphere, demands by local populations for structural reforms become inevitable (European Commission, 2011c).

Twinning activities in Egypt and Tunisia following the uprisings build upon this grid of intelligibility that revolves around the dualism of socio-economic development and the lack of local capacities. Thus, the visualisation of change around development capacity is not a neutral practice of monitoring and assessing Egyptian and Tunisian local conditions, but is integral to the act of governmentality, with significant power effects. The visibility of the local as a problem space not only frames and evaluates the adequacy, efficiency and serviceability of Egyptian and Tunisian physical, personal, institutional and regulatory attributes in relation to neoliberal logics, but also paves the way for Twinning interventions and corrections of a neoliberal nature. It is not any sort of socio-economic development that the Twinning instrument foresees, but one that requires technopolitical interventions amenable to neoliberal arrangements and networks, with a strong commitment to market ideas of self-management and competition and to a business- and investment-friendly strategy.

The Twinning programme carries out the neoliberal form of governmentality by redefining the relationship between economic and non-economic processes that were traditionally approached and treated separately, and the visibility act lies at the heart of this process. The construction of the uprisings as the outcome of socio-economic underdevelopment rooted in local vulnerabilities is constitutive of new spaces that are increasingly being understood and addressed by neoliberal rationalities and techniques. The illumination of the local is instrumental in defining non-economic fields in a marketised fashion and translating them into policy fields of governmental practices driven by market values of self-improvement, competition and professional management.

Vocational training is a good illustration at this point. In September 2011, the EU and Tunisia launched a Twinning project on 'Institutional Support to the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment in terms of Job Promotion'.² A similar project, with the title of 'Strengthening the Institutional Capacity of the Productivity and Vocational Training Department PVDT within the Vocational Training System in Egypt', has been continuing in Egypt under the leadership of Finland since 2013.³ What is common to these two projects is that the goal is to increase employment opportunities for Tunisian and Egyptian job seekers through the fostering of skills and the strengthening of communication, dialogue and interaction between the unemployed, the market and public bodies. Thus, as argued by Foucault, the economy is not a natural reality. Rather, the economy and its values are to be created through the development of the kind of infrastructure necessary for market processes. The activities of these two projects include training sessions and collaboration exercises at the national and international level with regard to vocational training and employment matters. In this regard, the projects are indicative of neoliberal governmentality as they focus on the optimisation of capacities and individual connections for the benefit of market processes. Under the EU–Tunisian Twinning project, analyses were carried out to investigate the dynamics of the job market

and partnerships were sought to link job seekers with business actors. In Egypt, Twinning capacity-building exercises are directed at the management skills, knowledge and technological competences of the Egyptian Productivity and Vocational Training Department with a view to increasing the international competitiveness of the Egyptian market. The visualisation of the local as an obstacle to development reinforces the neoliberal configuration of the project. It is only through perceiving change through the lens of development capacity at the local level that education becomes a target of technical interventions pursuing a competitive logic.

The visibility underpinning the Twinning programme and the spatial connections such visualisation generates have further implications. Expressing change in the language of local capacities has the effect of abstracting reality from its historical context. The focus of Twinning on the local implies that change in Tunisia and Egypt has no structural conditions of possibility and needs to be entirely pursued at the local level. The emphasis on development capacity, however, leaves untouched the three decades of (neo)liberal economic reforms implemented by Tunisian and Egyptian governments since the 1980s (Bergh, 2012; Pace and Cavatorta, 2012). The construction of reality around local capacities inevitably distances attention from the national market liberalisation and privatisation policies in these two countries that have generated mass poverty and uneven economic growth, worsened income inequalities and urban disparities, exacerbated unemployment, social exclusion and marginalisation, deepened rural underdevelopment, and widened local, national and regional asymmetries (Cavatorta and Haugbølle, 2012; Ismail, 2011; Volpi, 2013).

Furthermore, as problems are portrayed to be characteristic of indigenous populations, such as individual competences and infrastructure, there is barely any mentioning of international and transnational practices and linkages that are intimately related to socio-economic development in the two target countries. There is silence surrounding the instrumental role that international organisations, including EU institutions, have played in Tunisian and Egyptian economic and political reforms to link their economies to international economic processes (Pace and Cavatorta, 2012; Zemni and Bogaert, 2011). Twinning seemingly presumes no connection between the domestic and global networks of aid, investment and business that have supported neoliberal structures in Tunisia and Egypt. The blame still lies in local capacities, whereas internationally supported aid, credit and loan programmes that have backed Arab regimes in return for neoliberal adjustment programmes and reform measures are hardly questioned through reflexive engagement. For instance, with its exclusive interest in the local, the Twinning instrument keeps its hands off the close relations and alliances that Tunisian and Egyptian bureaucrats and elites have developed with foreign companies, institutions and states with neoliberal economic goals (Cavatorta and Haugbølle, 2012; Kandil, 2012).

This makes the Twinning instrument an act of neoliberal governmentality. The problematisation of local capacities not only turns Twinning activities into a governmentality project whereby new aspects of personal and institutional conduct are tied to and promoted by economic rationalities, as illustrated through vocational education projects, but also organises Twinning operations in such a way that structural matters pertaining to Tunisian and Egyptian social and economic development are left aside. Indeed, it is only through the illumination of the local and the connection of economic and non-economic

spheres that the Twinning instrument links its neoliberal governmentality agenda to domestic processes and stays away from contextual issues and relations with national and international dimensions. The act of visibility enables governmentality to be set into motion to act upon individual and institutional skills without dealing with historical and contextual questions relating to socio-economic development in Tunisia and Egypt.

The techne of benchmarking

The materialisation of governmentality around the visibility of development draws upon the *techne* of benchmarking, which consists of a variety of calculative techniques and measuring tools (Larner and Le Heron, 2004; Walters and Haahr, 2005). The Twinning instrument makes significant use of benchmarking in the form of indicators, quantitative outputs and deliverables that aim at the strategic guidance of project activity through funding choices, implementation and performance assessment. The programme requires each project to determine a number of benchmarks to achieve within a particular time frame. These benchmarks are to 'be measurable based on relevant indicators with adequate target values' resting on 'a detailed assessment of what is realistic and deliverable within the timeframe and budget available' (European Commission, 2012: 55). This makes each Twinning project a purposeful activity that is 'directly linked to an identifiable component' with 'well defined, focused and achievable' results (European Commission, 2012: 55). The aim is not to coerce, but to govern from a distance by encouraging funded projects to set measurable and concrete guidelines that 'assist in reaching the final results and in general good project management' (European Commission, 2012: 58).

Benchmarking under the Twinning instrument is a technique of neoliberal governmentality as it not only contributes to the illumination of local conditions as a problem sphere by translating development into a 'positivity, something that can be calculated' (Walters and Haahr, 2005: 131) along neoliberal criteria and measurement techniques, but also organises practices, linkages and information in a marketised fashion and establishes spatial and temporal connections between ontologically distinct policy fields around neoliberal principles. It does so by blurring imagined distinctions between the economic and the non-economic and inserting economic rationalities and techniques into what has traditionally been considered as being outside market processes.

Twinning actions in the field of energy are illustrative of the way in which benchmarking operates as a neoliberal technique of governmentality that encourages enterprise, rational conduct and competition in broader aspects of governance in the partner countries. An example is the Twinning Project 'Strengthening the Institutional Capacity of the Egyptian Electric Utility and Consumer Protection Agency (EGYPTERA)' as part of EU–Egypt energy cooperation. The general objective of the project is to reinforce 'the capacities of the EGYPTERA to become an efficient and reliable regulatory authority so the regulatory functions and the power sector reform process are implemented in accordance with EU and international best practices'.⁴ Defining the effective use and management of energy as key to socio-economic development, this project exemplifies neoliberal governmentality as progress and performance are planned and evaluated along neoliberal tools of calculation and comparison. For instance, the benchmarks of the first stage

of the project comprise of job training, the adoption of regulations and agreements, along with monitoring, data collection and simulation activities so that the EGYPTERA prepares itself for competitive, enterprise-oriented and efficient market processes. The second step of the project also utilises quantitative indicators, like the drafting of new legislation, licensing, publications and training, which praise success by reference to the EGYPTERA's progress and potential in further integrating itself into national and international market processes. Thus, Twinning exercises attest to the governmental nature of benchmarking in promoting market values in a policy field that has conventionally been governed by state-owned enterprises and through national strategy plans. Benchmarking is an indirect means of governance by inducing the EGYPTERA to devise its strategy and deliver results that necessitate the injection of values of competition and enterprise that the EGYPTERA has traditionally been unfamiliar with, and this is what neoliberal governmentality is. Quantitative indicators and measurement tools serve the calculative illustration of the competitiveness and marketisation of Egypt's energy sector rather than being reflective of the equal and fair distribution of natural resources and socially beneficial energy policies.

Benchmarking is suggestive of how quantifiable indicators turn development into a supposedly objective and neutral realm of scientific knowledge and experiment (Escobar, 1995). It does so by turning its targets into objects to be graded, contrasted and differentiated through a set of variables that omit significant aspects — both local and structural — to prove to be realistic and exchangeable (Walters and Haahr, 2005). This, however, also means that activities diverge from 'the vision of development where countries move along a historical trajectory' (Rojas, 2004: 104). Socio-economic development is no longer seen as a historical phenomenon with intrinsic qualities and its own progressive stages and traditions of emergence, expansion and consolidation. Rather, it becomes a field of neoliberal intervention, whereby the calculative elements of benchmarking outline the necessary steps to speed up the dissemination of economic logics into wider areas of public and private practices in the target countries. The technical language accompanying project selection and execution and performance evaluation contributes to this one-size-fits-all agenda by drawing an unquestioned linkage between 'realistic' and 'objective' outputs, on the one hand, and development, on the other.

The Twinning project 'Support the Improvement of Agricultural Research in Egypt through the Modernisation of the Agricultural Research Centre' shows the role of benchmarking in rendering development into a positivity. The project is an art of neoliberal governmentality as it ties (agricultural) research to economic ideas of competition, risk and productivity. The main purpose of the project is to increase agricultural production, food safety and food quality by fostering the technical and scientific skills of the Egyptian Agricultural Research Centre. The project induces agricultural research in Egypt to act in a business-minded manner. The technical assistance provided by the Twinning instrument supports the Agricultural Research Centre to acquire competences and technology in order to better observe market needs and expectations, analyse market dynamics along with consumer habits, and provide public authorities with risk-assessment reports and innovative ideas for policy development. Thus, development is no longer a historical phenomenon, but a purposeful act of governmentality that celebrates research done for the purpose of making Egyptian local conditions open to capital, investment and

business. The benchmarks envisaged for the project testify to an intimate relationship between research and agricultural development on the basis on marketisation. Egyptian agricultural research is not to be left to operate on its own accord. Instead, Twinning activities assist the Agricultural Research Centre in improving its competences and resources to contribute to ‘trade liberalization by removing non-tariff barriers to trade through the application of proper agricultural products measures’; increase ‘the competitiveness of Egyptian export products’ through risk analysis and quality assessment; build confidence between producers, business partners and public institutions; and support ‘the climate of investment in the Egyptian agricultural sector’.⁵

As such, benchmarking inevitably moves agricultural research in Egypt from historically and contextually sensitive practices. It overlooks how Egyptian land reforms and agricultural commercialisation since the 1950s have transformed the country from an exporter to an importer of food, widened public budget deficits, deepened poverty in rural areas, and created its monopolistic and elitist structures in agriculture (Kandil, 2012). Just as international development programmes with their ‘focus on the individual and spatial dimensions of poverty conceal the link between poverty and structural conditions’ (Rojas, 2004: 105), so benchmarking seems to be less concerned with the equal distribution of natural resources, the protection of the environment, the sustainable use of land and resources, and the eradication of poverty. Instead, benchmarking is a technique of neoliberal governmentality. The promotion of research activity conducive to business, capital and investment is possible through the technical language of planning, performance and professional solutions to local incapacities. In this way, the various indicators and measurement tools have broader neoliberal effects by relating non-economic locales to operations of neoliberal economic activity.

Subjects of developing local capacities

The EU promotes two kinds of subjects relying on principles of neoliberal governance. First, it intervenes into non-economic domains of Tunisian and Egyptian life with the objective of empowering the right sort of subjects that align themselves with the logics and requirements of the market. Examining the EU’s response to the Arab uprisings, Tagma et al. (2013: 378) observe how the ‘EU’s engagement with the actors of the Arab Spring ... is shaped by extensive engagement with and empowerment of entrepreneurial initiatives in both civil society and the economy’. This vision is reflected in the idea of ‘inclusive economic development’ (European Commission, 2011a: 7), which is a reflection of a neoliberal governmentality that promotes diffuse and decentralised processes of governance through subjects guided by entrepreneurial ideas and market logics of individual and social conduct (Vrasti, 2013). Inclusive economic development is argued to give a sound base to reforms favourable to business and investment. It pictures the Tunisian and Egyptian reform process as the collective work of small- and medium-sized enterprises, civil society, local stakeholders, the youth, universities, and enterprises, with a view to accomplishing ‘integrated employment and social policies, including matching of training initiatives and labour market needs, social dialogue, provision of social safety-nets and transformation of the informal sector’ (European Commission, 2011a: 8).

It is around this notion of inclusive economic development that subjects are being constituted through the labelling of the selves, the choice of local partners for EU programmes and the formation of objects/targets of operations to form conduct in line with economic rationalities (Tagma et al., 2013).

A similar attempt can be observed in the activities of the Twinning programme that celebrate subjects adopting entrepreneurial ideas and market logics of individual and social conduct. The governmentality approach points at the increasing promotion of neoliberal ideas of competition, enterprise and self-management into an expanding sphere of self-conduct in the target countries. The definition of the non-economic through the vocabulary of the market underpins Twinning activities. The Twinning instrument stresses the high level of unemployment in the two partner countries and relates this to the lack of local capacities. Thus, through training, capacity-building and vocational educational activities, the Tunisian and Egyptian youth is encouraged to turn into entrepreneurs and open up employment opportunities for both the self and others. The Twinning projects picture human capital as a resource to be employed for the realisation of individual and societal development.

The Twinning project on vocational training in Egypt follows this economic rationality. The project is expected to bring Egyptian vocational training to 'better standards'. To that end, capacity-building practices offered in the context of the project address the professional and organisational capacities of public officials in the Egyptian Vocational Training Department so that they internalise and disseminate ideas, knowledge and technical and management capacities with a view to opening up equal opportunities for all and increasing prospects for empowerment.⁶ Having said that, it will be mistaken to assume that empowerment gives local populations unconditional rights and opportunities. As Escobar (1995: 141) illustrates in relation to international development policies in Latin America, empowerment is attached to governmentality, which makes it 'more an intelligent and utilitarian imposition than a strategy of empowerment for local communities'. Likewise, empowerment through the Twinning vocational education project is an activity aiming to 'foster the employability and economic growth in Egypt'.⁷ The sort of individuals envisaged and empowered by the project are ones that possess or are ready to acquire knowledge, skills, qualifications and practical experience with a maximum degree of 'responsiveness to industry's needs in terms of skills and competencies'.⁸ This indicates a shift in the understanding of empowerment. Empowerment acquires a new meaning in favour of the market principle. It is the acquirement and improvement of human capital in economic terms rather than 'the ability of citizens to make claims upon, and influence the content of, collective political institutions' (Parker, 2009: 118). The citizen is no longer a political subject who enters in to a voluntary social contract with state institutions and endows them of their own free will with the authority to govern in return for social welfare provisions and citizenship rights. Rather, the Twinning instrument promotes neoliberal subjects defined by the idea of competition and enterprise- and risk-oriented action and by the degree of their employability in and contribution to the Egyptian economy. Under these circumstances, education is understood less as a right in line with a social welfare vision of government, than as a sort of 'commodity' to be worked upon and 'exchanged on market principles' (Willemse and De Beer, 2012: 107).

Second, the Twinning programme redefines the meaning of government. The neoliberal framing of development pushes the state into the background (Escobar, 1995; Rojas, 2004). This is by no means equal to saying that the state becomes irrelevant. Rather, the duties and position of the government and public institutions undergo a significant reformulation in line with the economic rationality. Governments are expected to behave 'like the government of a business' by taking the market as their rule of conduct and formulating targeted strategies and methods towards the realisation of market-centred objectives (Walters and Haahr, 2005: 128). What is foreseen for the Tunisian and Egyptian governments is to govern in line with neoliberal logics and expectations. Job creation is a good example of how the role of government is defined and adjusted in terms of the normative guidance of behaviour towards EU objectives. In the field of labour, the partner governments are to set the necessary legal and institutional apparatus to foster 'employability' (European Commission, 2011b: 7), especially among young Arabs, by means of 'matching skills and labour market needs' (European Commission, 2011c: 5). In other words, they are expected to govern not through direct intervention, but from a distance by means of 'the creation, protection and non-violation of the necessary regulatory framework' (Tagma et al., 2013: 384). The main responsibility of job creation for the Egyptian and Tunisian youth lies in entrepreneurial individuals who benefit from existing financial and capacity-building opportunities offered by their governments and the EU and conduct the self and empower others with a view to participating in the market and contributing to economic development (Tagma et al., 2013: 384).

The promotion of governments to act like a business is evident in the EU–Tunisian Twinning project 'Support of the National Prevention Plan for Occupational Accidents and Diseases', carried out during 2012–2014.⁹ In this project, the Twinning instrument encourages government behaviour following economic rationalities in an essentially non-economic field, that is, health. The central purpose of this Twinning intervention is the reinforcement of the capabilities and infrastructure of Tunisian national institutions in reducing occupational and work-related accidents. Technical assistance and capacity-building exercises are designed along benchmarks displaying neoliberal values. Good governance is evaluated and fostered through indicators that portray government as a 'biopolitical' activity. The project supports the kind of development that pictures good governance as the ability of Tunisian public institutions to administer health in an efficient way by undertaking activities like risk calculation, risk assessment and risk reduction. Benchmarks are headed towards the advancement of government capabilities in identifying risks, taking effective precautionary measures and improving health coverage. In other words, government is conceptualised and promoted as a calculating activity to reduce risks and decrease costs in health matters. It is risk-oriented and not necessarily welfare-oriented.

Conclusion

Development has been a high priority in EU relations with Tunisia and Egypt since the 1990s. The issue has become even more salient since the start of the Arab uprisings, as made clear in the repeated references to economic growth and prosperity in EU documents on the two countries. In this article, I have sought to understand EU promotion of socio-economic development in the Tunisian and Egyptian contexts. Through the case of Twinning, I have applied a neoliberal governmentality approach with insights from

Dean's analytics of government. The added value of Dean's framework is that it enables us to examine governmentality by looking at specific practices of visualisation, technologies and subjects. This three-step analysis makes a valuable contribution to uncovering how the Twinning instrument operates in subtle ways to act upon non-economic spheres by means of economic rationalities and attempts to link the former to the latter. It points out that the Twinning instrument employs a neoliberal governmentality agenda that constitutes the local as a problem area in need of rule and improvement while moving away from structural politics related to socio-economic development. Such vision opens the way to interventions through which individual skills, institutional arrangements and societal linkages turn into calculable objects to be corrected, monitored, graded, appraised, categorised and dismissed so that they are connected to wider market processes of a neoliberal nature. Twinning also proves to be an act of governmentality in its operations striving to foster the kind of competitive and enterprise individuals by framing individual conduct and government in relation to the economic sphere.

A further contribution of the study to debates on neoliberalism in North Africa is to show how a non-ideological and non-political instrument operating at the micro-level, like Twinning, might have effects that exceed its agenda. The empirical analysis has underscored, for instance, that the visualisation of change as a matter of local capacity development detaches reality from structural conditions and disguises the link between Tunisian and Egyptian socio-economic development and transnational processes of aid, capital, business and investment. Furthermore, EU performance practices in aid and development programmes make use of information, concepts and development indicators coming from international organisations to design their programmes. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations and the World Bank are important sources of information for EU institutions in defining abnormalities as regards poverty, unemployment and relevant economy statistics and developing the terminology and methods to achieve international development objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals (EuropeAid, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that Twinning is integral to the broader international discourse on development, for it draws upon its conceptual and calculative techniques and produces effects that contribute to its reproduction through acts of visibility and invisibility. In addition to all these, Foucault, himself, asserts that micro-level practices might be taken up, reproduced and multiplied 'by forms of global domination' (Foucault, 1980: 99). Although it is not very likely to observe such effects in the short run, the possibility that certain Twinning actions might feed into international development programmes in the longer term cannot be ruled out. This assumption proves more relevant given that governmentality never reaches an end point, but continuously evolves, with rationalities and techniques being transformed and new ones being adopted for and adjusted to emerging needs and solutions.

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Notes

1. In this article, Arab countries refer to those that have experienced uprisings starting from 2010.
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