Migrant and Refugee Uprisings in Lebanon and Tunisia: A Failed South Solidarity

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Introduction

Since the waves of protests that swept the MENA region over the last fifteen years, popular mobilizations encompassed the plights of many marginalized groups, including cultural sub-groups within the national whole, calling for indigenous, migrant, and refugee rights amongst the widespread uprisings for dignity and socio-economic justice. Many Arabic-speaking countries have been undergoing transitional processes, since then, to encompass and/or coopt social movements within their governance structures, whether through rewriting constitutions, political debates, creating new governance bodies, or performative referendums – all these manifestations of public political engagement broke a tradition of protracted exceptionalism of the MENA region as to the resilience of its dictatorships. Nonetheless, social change is a process, not an event and throughout the thirteen years of recent contention, negotiations between social movements and governments have become more visible but not always effective. Challenged regimes of Arabic speaking countries prompted their constituencies to rally around the flag against various populations, in an attempt to safeguard their own rule.

State-sponsored racism capitalizes on a discourse of sovereignty, not from the colonizer, but from the migrant and refugee, thus weaponizing national chauvinism towards its own survival. Oftentimes, these same states have western-backed rulers and political agendas sponsored by foreign patrons. However, national sovereignty is invoked in a eugenic fight against migrants and refugees. Despite the spectacular 2011 and 2019 uprisings worldwide and in the Arabic-speaking countries, xenophobic policies are enacted by government and "citizen" populations alike in lieu of people's South-South solidarities. The imagined "horizontal comradeship" (Mohanty 2003) of transnational projects such as Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism, and Third-Worldism (Laleh Khalili 2012; Elisabeth Armstrong 2016; Samir Amin 2017; Anup Dhar and Anjan Chakrabarti 2019) is on the decline, leaving the space

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to a depoliticized global/humanitarian NGOized activism (Khalili 2012), with postcolonial states adopting imperialist racial hierarchies.

Thus, in this paper, I am looking at two moments of upheaval in Tunisia and Lebanon: governments fearing their demise have issued decrees targeting migrants and refugees in an effort to gain in popularity at critical moments in their trajectory. Within this scope, I will discuss the policy and socio-economic context of the eruption of civil movements, carrying the demands of these minoritized populations, argue that the marginalization process in Tunisia and Lebanon reflects colonial hierarchies within the definition of their citizenry, and discuss fearmongering over the "demographic threat" of naturalization as a rally 'round the flag tactic aimed to extend a lifeline to challenged regimes. I conclude with the necessity of South-South horizontal comradeship to build on the post-revolutionary momentum.

Ultimately, the study aims to expose the understanding of bodies trespassing borders as aggressive/temporal/backward is not a phenomenon limited to the Global North, but a modern phenomenon in centering citizenship, material and imagined, impeding South-South solidarities. Challenging citizenship as a premise for organizing local revolts creates moral panics, systemic and figurative exclusions of 'infiltrators' or "outside agitators," their erasure from history, and, consequentially, their delegitimization as actors of liberation, as in the cases of Lebanon and Tunisia with two distinct categories of non-citizens: Palestinian refugees and Sub-Saharan migrants, respectively.

Policy Context and Recent Upheavals

A decade after the Tunisian revolution of 2011, President Kais Saied took "extraordinary measures," otherwise known as the Coup of July 25, 2021, assuming power over all executive branches of the government, extending his power to everything from legislation to the media (Yerkes and Alhomoud 2022). The public sentiments varied between knee-jerk celebration of the overturn of the Islamic Party Ennahda and the scrutiny over the return of authoritarianism. Whether the event itself was celebrated or not has little bearing over its very definition; it was a coup moving Tunisia from the dictatorship of the turbans to that of the men in blue, bringing back the police state. Facing increased scrutiny, Kais Saied convened the National Security Council[1] on February 21st, 2023, to discuss what he dubbed as the alarming situation of Sub-Saharan Migrants' presence in Tunisia. The number of Sub-Saharan migrants has increased from 7000 to 21,400 between 2014 and 2021 (Ben Khalifa and Mabrouk 2023), and the president warned against a looming "demographic change" that was to destroy Tunisia's essence or identity. President Saied has described the increase as "abnormal" and "part of a plot" and "pointed out that there is a criminal arrangement that has been prepared since the beginning of this century to change the demographic composition of

Tunisia and that there are parties that received huge sums of money, after 2011, in order to settle irregular immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Tunisia." These parties, of course, were vaguely referenced and unnamed.

The presidential statement and subsequent decree have started what could only be described as a witch-hunt against Sub-Saharan migrants, encouraging Tunisian good-Samaritans (read: mobs) to terrorize migrants in their homes. The state-sponsored xenophobia and racism were not limited to encouraging discourse, but also to policy that bans Tunisians from employing and providing housing to them under the risk of facing jail time. The fact that the National Security Council was summoned to discuss migration showcases that migrants are treated as a national threat, as an exogeneous shock to the nation that must be surveilled, policed, or even annihilated. While the policy targeted migrants, the practice encompassed any black person, clarifying its populist eugenic undertones. With essential products being scarce and absent from supermarkets, such as rice which disappeared from shelves in January 2022, the culprit was pinpointed in the now governmentally controlled media: "Africans eat too much" (Parikh 2023). Of course, Africans here are an idiom for Sub-Saharan migrants, for a Tunisian racist identity is constructed in opposition; if Africans are black, then the authentic Tunisians are not.

In Lebanon, the revolutionary momentum culminated in the October Uprising of 2019. However, it was preceded by multiple moments of rupture, including the forgotten uprisings of non-citizens. In an unprecedented event, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon protested against their increased marginalization during the Camps' Uprising, demanding civil rights (Sulayman and Khatib 2019). The protests followed the decision of the Lebanese Minister of Labor to demand that Palestinian refugees apply for work permits in order to be granted right to work in the limited menial jobs they can access. The camps dubbed this as a "war of starvation" and have organically mobilized to boycott the Lebanese markets to showcase their economic contribution. In addition to strikes and boycotts, the camp residents, mobilized in marches, left their camp territories to address the Lebanese authorities from the streets.

This decree came against a backdrop of acute disenfranchisement as Palestinians had already experienced severe marginalization as they were banned from syndicated professions and those of them living in camps were subject to continuous potential siege. Although the Camps' Uprising was successful in reverting the decision of the Ministry of Labor, it did not lead to any permanent changes in the relationship with the Lebanese Labor movement, for the latter replicated the structures of exclusion of Palestinian refugees produced by the government (Bou Khater 2022).

The 2019 Palestinian Camps' Uprising has raised questions about Palestinian refugee involvement in Lebanese public sphere. Are Palestinians

entitled to ask for civil rights? Groups met and discussed for days the "how" of the claim making: Should we ask nicely or else we will raise the memory of the civil war? (Abu Ghazal 2019) Insofar what has been permitted by legislation; Palestinians in Lebanon could make claims associated to their own homeland; for example, they could wish for the end of the occupation, protest against the Zionist annexation of land, etc. But if it is an injustice taking place in the god-blessed land of the Lebanese, the story was different. The Nakba was to be confined in the 1948 moment and within the Palestinian land, it was not to spillover to neighboring territories. So, when the Camps Uprising took place, it had little resonance in local organizing which centered the citizen as the sole legitimate owner of rights.

National Identity and the "Clash of Definitions"

Citizenship, in the age of the nation state, is the sole vessel through which rights are acquired and the state is their guarantor. In times of uncertainty, dissidence, and contention, states attempt to summon the rally 'round the flag' effect by promoting xenophobia and racism against those other from the state's system of belonging. The privileges of citizenship are not uniformly bestowed, rather, they are articulated strategically by the powers at hand. Whereas nationality and nation come from the Latin *natio*, or *being born*, citizenship in Lebanon and Tunisia is not acquired through birth alone. The boundaries of the creation of a country's citizenry, in this case Lebanese and Tunisian citizenry, are clearly demarcated through imagined affinities and artificial rivalries to manufacture the duality of "us" and "them".

The language of group identity in Tunisia and Lebanon manifests itself with eugenic undertones and while the dualities of citizen and non-citizen are of a contextual nature such as Sub-Saharan migrant/Tunisian citizen and Palestinian Refugee/Lebanese citizen, they are reminiscent of the *grand* clash, that of civilizations. Of course, this is not to dignify the Huntingtonian preposition, rather, to trace the analogous manifestation of the imperial hierarchies where one civilization (Western) is superior and must be victorious, and the other is doomed with lazy generalizations and ahistorical accounts of essentialist nature. The culture/identity of the citizen is portrayed as developed or civilized, whereas that of the migrant/refugee is shrunk to lazy generalizations. These "lesser people" cannot speak or respond to their own marginalization.

Palestinians in Lebanon live in a state of protracted refuge, in conditions that were not intended to be temporary, despite being framed as such within the very definition of a refugee. To that effect, a refugee has limited rights and a precarious existence until they are resettled into their homeland or become naturalized: the former is not yet possible with the conditions of statelessness imposed on displaced and ethnically cleansed Palestinians since 1948, and the

latter is a 'luxury' affordable to the few. In the Lebanese context, it is affordable to women who carry Lebanese children, for citizenship is a right that passes through the blessed sperm of Lebanese men (Yasmine and Sukkar, 2019). Without the protection of a state, or its racketeering, through which rights are distributed, Palestinian refugees pose a dilemma to ideas of classic sovereignty in relation to nativity and nationality.

With decades elapsing since the Nakba, Palestinians in Lebanon and Lebanese authorities have understood that the refuge might transform into one more permanent citizen than both had hoped for. The colonial French project in Mount Lebanon required the categorization of the local community along the religious lines to be legible and the compartmentalization of space to be based on religious affiliation. These are the fault lines and civilizational narratives (Mitchell 1991) inherited by the Lebanese postcolonial state, where Christian denominations equated the West versus others, Muslim denominations and Druze who equated the Authentic Eastern (Makdisi 2000). This project was so important that the 1932 census was designed to create a Westernized state by the ruling elite and no census has been conducted since to maintain the facade of the Christian majority (Maktabi 1995). The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are predominantly Sunni and pause a demographic "threat" to the colonial civilizational project that manifested in the creation of the Lebanese citizenry. It is the same "civilizational" Faultline that led to the Civil War when on April 13, 1975, the armed wing of a Lebanese Christian Maronite political party, called the Phalanges,[2] attacked a bus carrying 27 Palestinian and Lebanese commuters, killing all of them including children (Khazen 1991, Khalaf 2002, Traboulsi 2012), resulting in a 15 year-long civil war. The Lebanese state later signed the Taif Accord, creating an ethno-national prototype of power-sharing agreement between diverse sectarian elite to end the Civil War. Within the power-sharing alleged balance, demographic changes become suspect, and migrants and refugee bodies are disciplined accordingly.

Palestinian refugees exist under the state of exception not only within the camps, but also outside of them in Lebanon, as the government exercises political power on their bodies deciding not only on the spatial boundaries of their existence but also on their capacity to survive. Palestinians in Lebanon are banned from over 30 syndicated professions. Other white-collar professions have rules of their own including being Lebanese and being a labor union member in Lebanon (Seghaier and Le Renard 2023) effectively banning Palestinians from performing these jobs. Furthermore, while the Lebanese labor law does not have a specific mention of Palestinian refugees, it has mentions of the requirement for reciprocity: it only gives work permits to citizens of countries that give work permits to Lebanese citizens (ILO 2012). That said, the Palestinians are officially stateless, and no state can reciprocate

on their behalf. The legal loophole is not an oversight, but a governmental decision. Furthermore, freedom of assembly is the exclusive right of citizens in Lebanon, which means the effective exclusion of migrants and refugees from collective claim making. Further, it penalizes them for such activity.

In Tunisia, post-colonial state-formation took a different path. With President Habib Bourguiba being a so-called "enlightened dictator," political Islam has been persecuted in his time and the time of his ousted successor Ben Ali. In fact, both presidents attempted to rely on becoming the sole interpreters of the doctrine, but have failed at monopolizing Islamic symbolisms (McCarthy 2014, Blackman 2019). Along the period of the state-formation, the imagined national identity has revolved around notions of modernity as equated to Westernization and included a governmental agenda of state-feminism (Yacoubi, 2016). The 2011 revolutionary moment ruptured this tradition of claiming a progressive, secular, and westernized identity, with the election of an Islamist political party to occupy the majority of the parliamentary seats, the same party that Kais Saied overturned in his Coup. The changing governments have also contributed to the changes in the populist articulations of the Tunisian national identity.

Zalta and Krašovec's, however, ventured in their funded research (2024) to find "experts" who self-assigned the role of articulating the essence of what it is to be Tunisian. The authors, albeit as well-intentioned as their interlocutors, summarized Tunisia to be a Muslim state with its identity being "a fusion of different identities—Ottoman, Islamic, Arab, Italian, French, Lebanese, African" (Zalta and Krašovec 2024; 7). The listing of some (and not other) ethnic and religious groups and ancestries is not a robust scientific endeavor, but rather an attempt to showcase a fusion that unwittingly obscures diversity. If anything, this is a testament to the fact that even progressive discourses against puritanical stories of origin of the Tunisian population invertedly replicate eugenic arguments. Besides the fact that any eugenic type of argument is problematic for acquisition of rights for all, the figuring of "Lebanese" in there is not innocent. It is a reference to the building of Carthage by the Phoenician traders arriving from Tyre in today's Lebanon. With Carthage being created in 814 BCE, predating the Lebanese nation state, references to "Lebanon" are idiom for Phoenicia. It illuminates an important identitarian analogy amongst the Lebanese and the Tunisians identifying with a civilization that spanned from 1550 to 300 B.C.E., rather than with their compatriots, neighbors, and migrants or refugees from across their very border. The reference is reminiscent of the discourse on the 3,000 years of civilization in the country, a civilization that only started, allegedly, with the arrival of the Phoenicians and the building of Carthage, marking everything and everyone that predates it, including the indigenous other, as archaic and primitive, or uncivilized. "We are descendants of the Phoenicians" or simply

"Lebanese" is euphemism for everything that *we,* or the Tunisian citizens are *not*.

So what Tunisian citizens are *not,* in this imaginary identity, is black. Skin-color was decisive in the formation of the exclusion and civilizational fault-line. Although Zalta and Krašovec (2024) observed that the Christian faith of Sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia contributes to their alienation, there is little disaggregated data outlining the religious backgrounds of the migrants. Granted, the observation is in line with multiple migrant experiences in Tunisia, however, it is suspected to replicate the idea of the clash of cultures and/or civilizations in its most basic format; with those persecuted being of the creed of the Western and with Islam summarized in its opposition to Western ideals. In fact, the statistics show quite the contrary, the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights collected date published in the "Field survey on the situation of migrants in Tunisia: preliminary quantitative results" in July 2024 suggest that Sudanese migrants (read: Muslim) are the biggest Sub-Saharan migrant population as refugees fled and continue to flee the war in their home country (Communication FTDES, 2024).

While the ethnographic findings have no doubt showed a tendency of othering based on stereotyping, including that of religious nature, it echoes a populist discourse more than the material patterns of the exclusion. The portrayal of the civilizational clash in Tunisia as a conflict between progressive secularism and Islamic jurisprudence and tradition is a legacy of French colonial times and the top-down laïcité imposed during the eras of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. Skin-color, on the other hand, is decisive. Black Tunisians, whom the hatred campaign has encompassed, and who are presumably Muslim, have described, in their activism, an environment where racial discrimination has been "long occluded by layers of taboo and denial" (Mzioudet, 2023: 63). As I write this paper, Black leaders of Tunisian racial justice movements are in prison, including pioneer feminist and racial justice advocate Saadiyah Mosbah (Parikh 2024) and founder of M'nemty organization for Black Tunisians. In the absence of official figures, M'nemty activists reported to Minority Rights Group International in 2020, that black Tunisians constitute 10–15 % of the population (Mzioudet, 2023). In fact, race or ethically based statistics in Tunisia are banned since the state-formation as they are considered a divisive affront to the notion of *Tunisianness*; a fusion of identities that obscures specific forms of racism such as Anti-Blackness. This static perception of culture and identity as essentialist plagues both sympathetic and racist discourses. Such a clash of definitions "seems to be exactly what we do not need" (Said 2015, 87).

Although the Lebanese Ministry of Labor aimed to "protect" Lebanese jobs and overall security as did the Tunisian National Security Council, their political action is far from sovereign. They are the expressions of imperial

hierarchies imported into local contexts. In the case of Tunisia, it is an expression of a literal contemporary political interest of Italy which exported its borders onto North Africa through a migration policing deal with Tunisia. The witch-hunt was never a matter of seeking national sovereignty, but it was a direct western interest executed on Tunisian grounds.

Eugenic Boundaries of Inclusion/Exclusion

The boundaries of inclusion and exclusion follow a similar script in states with challenged authority. As imperial centers assume that "outside agitators" are instigators of unrest and revolt, so do postcolonial states projecting imperial hierarchies onto their constituencies. Whereas Tunisia is an African country to whom native brown and black populations belong, the idea of black Tunisians being the descendants of the formerly enslaved people brought into the North of Africa through the Trans-African slave trade is dominant, especially with certain family last names reflecting the memory of enslavement. Affet Mosbah, sister to the black organizer, Saadiyah Mosbah, wrote that she is "too black to be Tunisian, yet black enough to be readily displaced into an undifferentiated sub-Saharan African plane, often interpellated with the political misnomer 'Africa'" (Ltifi 2020, 55). The descendants of formerly enslaved black people in Tunisia became a class of urban sub-proletariat in urban locations in the South, with others working in destitute professions, due to a mix of disenfranchisement and racist folkloric tales (Bahri 2014, Ben Khalifa and Mabrouk 2023, Mzioudet 2023). Colonial rule has increased the Tunisian bureaucracy and deepened the state, further dispossessing those remaining at the margin of geography and education by design. Similarly, sub-Saharan migrants have been accused of crime, begging, illicit activity, labor competition, and overall unsanitary life-styles. State-feminism has also served to propagate the idea of their greed and jealousy. In their research, Zalta and Krašovec (2024) report from their export meetings that Sub-Saharan Africans want to stay in Tunisia because women have it better there, a statement that clashes with the experiences of migrants described in the field survey of the Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights, where the great majority of the surveyed formulated their escape into Tunisia not as a choice, but as an unescapable destiny.

The though of black people being historical outsiders to the countries' territory is not new. Father of Sociology, Ibn Khaldoun, who was born in today's Tunisia referred to Black people in the South of Niger as having "no civilization in the proper sense," accusing them of cannibalism, among other atrocities, and celebrating their capture as slaves (King 2021, 16). In the 1800s, Black Africans who attempted to escape their enslavement were at the risk of starvation and dehydration, as oases and water resources were controlled by non-Black African pastoralists and white colonists. Today, the similarity is

uncanny with Sub-Saharan Africans being deported towards Tunisian Southern borders and forced into Libya where "at least 27 people [were] found dead in desert" in August 2023 (Al Jazeera 2023). Black people, however, were local residents of today's Tunisia before the Trans-African slave trade. Yet, the discourse on racial superiority popularized in the era of eugenics seeped into the national identity formation, whereby the local "intellectual" in North Africa, would distance himself from proximity to the enslaved. In other words, there is a recognition of Tunisia's role in the slave trade through the inevitable tying of black citizens to such an ancestry, but there is a denial of non-black Tunisian ties to a racist history of slavery.

Although Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are not legible by color like Sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia, they experience the vilification of their portrayal. Since the Nakba, Palestinians have sought refuge in neighboring countries where they have been placed in camps designed with different logics. In Lebanon, they have been excluded from the governance and urban structure by design, with camps being literally walled-off and closed to the public with the exception of a few (Hanafi 2008, 2011). The camps are articulated and produced as spaces that limit Palestinian existence to "bare life" (Hanafi 2011: 38, Hanafi and Long 2010: 135, Amiri 2016: 5). Palestinians are treated as an endogenous shock to the nation, placed as "outsiders" (Halabi 2004: 46) in "outside sites" (Amiri 2016: 7) and relegated to sub-human forms of existence; they are "reduced to their status as individuals in need of shelter and food, the governance of their bare- life has been transferred to the hands of the police and military on the one hand, and to an apolitical relief organization such as the UNRWA, on the other hand" (Hanafi 2011, 38).

There are two presumed "threats" that Palestinian refugees pose in the Lebanese context. One is naturalization or assimilation into the local fabric to the extent that it changes the demographic make-up of the Lebanese citizenry, and the other is simply war (Abu Ghazal 2019). Relegated to bare life in the camps, Palestinian demands have also been shaped to be confined within the territory of the camp. Palestinian refugees are entitled to demand infrastructural changes in the camp or humanitarian support such as better water supplies or electricity, etc. These demands are to be made from their local camp authorities and anything that is not resolved within the camp is ultimately the responsibility of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (Sayigh 1994; Salti et al. 2017; Issa 2021). The local authorities in the camp, the Popular Committees as well as the Palestinian factions, do not have a legal status and cannot sign contracts, so they cannot be "partners" with municipalities, or any other organizations allowed to sign contracts. Practically, they are excluded from municipal services, but included in the taxation and the surveillance systems (Hanafi 2014; El Zakka et al 2023). The state of governance in camps is a "chaos" (Hanafi 2011; Hajj 2017) permitted

by the interactions between the state of exception, as articulated by Agamben, embodied in the existence in camps, devoid of political agency and rights, and extraterritoriality as operating within one territory but with rules exterior to its governance.

Thus, with the absence of classical governance, camp-dwellers have relied on informal governmentality, including Islamic governmentality to fill the existing vacuum. It is not a mere alignment of religious beliefs, but the affinity of socio-economic conditions that enabled Lebanese-Palestinian allyships, in underprivileged areas, plagued by a sectarian territorialization. These affinities are often found within a common desire to survive and disdain of the existing power-sharing regime. In 2008, fighting erupted in Nahr el-Barid Camp (NBC), located in the North of Lebanon on the outskirts of the impoverished and predominantly Sunni city of Tripoli, between the members of a then newly founded Islamic militant group called Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese Internal Security Forces. The vilification of the non-Western civilizational project imprinted further on Palestinian refugees, as their camps placed on outskirts of impoverished areas meant that religious militant groups could nest within them and adopt insurgent tactics. Within the clash of "civilizational projects," Islamic governmentalities are frequently a rare local actor that considers Palestinians in Lebanon as an in-group to a certain extent. The NBC events led to the increase of surveillance and treatment of camps as "security islands" (Hanafi 2011, 30) and laboratories for policing. A reconciliation document, written in Vienna, formulated a new way of camps' management: "community policing" (33). The language of the agreement was articulating a cooperation/collaboration between the local camp-dwellers and the Lebanese Internal Security Forces, of course, an agreement that camp-dwellers could not sign as they lack legal status. The agreement mandates that Palestinian refugees and their organizations must invite the Lebanese police to events about the "political history of the Palestinians refugees in Lebanon" and their "cultural and social specificities" (33). In exchange for partaking in "local events," the Lebanese police was to "govern" the camps.

When the Camps' Uprising finally erupted in 2019, the climate in allegedly progressive political movements was no different than reading the protestors with a security lens. It happened in August and was followed, a few months later, by the October Uprising in Lebanon. Albeit being so close in revolutionary momentum, the two uprisings were not linked to one another, for the Palestinian one was erased from the narrative of the 2019 wave of revolts. *Suhmatiya*, a Palestinian feminist organizer from Lebanon who writes under a pseudonym, reflected on her fatigue with having to constantly explain herself and her stakes when she was protesting in the streets alongside Lebanese people in October:

> Sometimes I catch myself thinking that I do not feel as erased by
> a movement that replaced political parties' flags by the Lebanese
> flag – that's an improvement. But I am still not a part of it. How
> can I justify my being in the streets without using cliches that I do
> not believe in? I do not love Lebanon; I do not feel that I belong
> here. And this feeling is mutual. Lebanese nationalism is overt and
> covert violence directed at me and my fellow migrants and
> refugees. (Suhamatiya 2019)

In that same fashion, black Tunisians reported puzzled looks confused about
their color when they were protesting in front of the Ministry of Interior in
2011, during the revolutionary uprising that ousted Ben Ali (Mzioudet 2022)
– let alone Sub-Saharan migrants who have no citizenship leverage to rally.

The groups reduced to "lesser nations" are cornered to defend themselves
as they are placed on the suspect's seat. When writing a blog entry about the
uprising titled, "Palestinian Thoughts for Lebanon," Sarah Abu Ghazal,
another Palestinian feminist organizer from Lebanon, knew to postface the
title with "(Don't be Scared)" in parenthesis (Abu Ghazal, 2019). Knowing
her audience, she knew that any Palestinian thoughts for Lebanon will be
treated as suspect. Criticizing the sympathetic discourse on the Camps
Uprising for nostalgically recalling how once upon a time Palestinians and
Lebanese fought together, she warned that this is precisely a validation of the
Civil War scare. Knowingly or not, progressive and racist discourse alike
confined the Palestinian agency in the Lebanese state within the memory and
the threat of the Civil War. Unironically, this is the same language used by
national media in Tunisia when reporting about fighting that erupted among
Sub-Saharan migrants and Tunisian citizens: In the Southern city of Sfax, the
3rd largest city in Tunisia, three Cameroonian migrants stabbed their Tunisian
attacker to death. Unrests followed as the police started mass deportation
campaigns assisted by gangs of Tunisian volunteers. These events were
dubbed as a civil war.

Conclusion

The political moment in post-revolutionary Tunisia has allowed the bringing
to the frontlines issues of justice that were obscured in the country's
legislation. In a legal precedence, black activists succeeded in proving that
addressing race was essential to fulfill the 2014 Constitutional promise of
equal citizenship in Tunisia. However, citizenship remained the central vessel
through which rights are achieved. Thus, discourses on *Tunisianness* and its
fusional make-up, promulgated by the progressives, continue to obscure anti-
black racism in the country, cornering black Tunisians into discourse on
citizenship for right acquisition and imprisoning those who stand beside

migrant rights. Similarly, the political moment briefly brought Palestinian refugees and other organizers in Lebanon together in an unprecedented moment of organizing across segregation and against the state of exception. Whenever anyone has hinted at a reform associated to the status of Palestinians, the consecutive Lebanese governments continuously reject such attempts. The otherwise fragmented government is united in considering that granting refugees rights, including labor rights, equals their permanent settlement (ILO 2012).

The ghost, or rather the ghoul of the civil war and the shackles of othering through the confinement of Palestinians and Sub-Saharan Africans in Lebanon and Tunisia, respectively, within the image of a demographic/existential threat seeped through popular uprisings. They plagued not only governmental commentary on the movement, but also prevented a durable alliance from happening within our very own organizing circles. Adopting the eugenic boundaries of inclusion/exclusion within the definition of our progressive movements is an expression of imperial hierarchies that services the ever-shrinking civil space. Including migrants and refugees in civil rights and in organizing is a threat, but it isn't a threat to national sovereignty or peace, it is a threat to the legacies and the present of (neo)colonialism in Tunisia and Lebanon.

Notes
1. See the official statement of the Tunisian Presidency's Facebook Page.
2. CIA report calls the Phalanges fascist on page 4: Lebanon's Phalanges Party (cia.gov). It reports that the party's founder was inspired by Hitler and created the party to protect "Maronite interests." The Phalanges will later go on to massacre Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

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