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ON SILENCE AND (IN-)VISIBILITY:

WHITHER BLACK TUNISIAN MOBILIZATION IN
POST-2011 TUNISIA?

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Introduction

When Tunisian President, Kais Saied made his fiery speech about hordes of Black African illegal migrants' malevolent design to replace indigenous Tunisians and strip the North African nation of its "Arabic-Islamic" identity, some observers, outside the African continent, were bemused about what could amount to an oxymoronic moment of a Tunisian identity crisis.

In his 21 February 2023 speech, the Tunisian populist leader's rhetoric changed to espouse the white nationalist and European Far-right Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory, therefore being the first "Arab" leader to join the Pantheon of its proponents with the likes of Hungary's Viktor Orbán and French Éric Zemmour. This is a dystopian moment in Tunisian contemporary history, representing a shift to "authoritarian restoration", in the country that ushered the "Arab Spring". This shift happened in an era of a globalized populist new world order characterized by the resurgence of public calls for "remigration" as consequential of the Great Replacement theory.¹ That Tunisia becomes the first country in the MENA to adopt at the highest official levels a theory that had long targeted North Africans as a threat to the white, Christian European civilization is an irony of fate and should alert us to the permeability and the easy diffusion of Far Right politics among non-white nations.

What ensued was a black witch-hunt that saw systematic racial violence that included evictions, physical attacks, and burning of property belonging to Black Africans, be they "regular or irregular" so much so that the South African weekly newspaper, *The Continent*, titled its 4 March [cover](#) "Blame black people: Tunisia's President finds a scapegoat". The horror did not spare anyone who looks Black, including the least visible and most marginalized in the Black Tunisian community. Despite representing the largest minority group in the country – between 10 and 15% according to some unofficial statistics – Black Tunisians have become the collateral damage of this openly racist campaign that criminalizes an already fragile population in the context of political, social, and economic turmoil since Saied's self-coup in July 2021.

Caught in this general bedlam, this historically marginalized, invisible, and silent/silenced minority population came to epitomize the Tunisian paradox, one that is marked by a false veneer of a homogenous and harmonious Tunisian society, and exposes its [dirty secret](#) of the racial taboo, revealing

the ugly reality of racism that is now adopted by the highest authority figure in the country.

Saied regime's systematic crackdown on political opponents and civil society activists did not inhibit them. They made it loud and clear that they will not be silenced when the red line of unhinged courting with white supremacist, racist and xenophobic rhetoric on the part of an African leader is crossed. While the attack on the physical integrity of Black Africans as Tunisia's most maligned and marginalized group shocked many Tunisians, who came out in the hundreds on 25 February 2023 in downtown Tunis in an anti-fascism protest against the violent crackdown on Black African migrants, little attention was paid to the one million or so of Black Tunisians. While the figure of one million Black Tunisians may sound innocuous to many non-black Tunisians, normalized to the quasi-absence of Black Tunisians in the public space, during the anti-racism protest that specifically affected Black Africans, who are as marginalized as Black Tunisians, there had not been a large turnout of Black Tunisians as one may expect. Many Black Tunisian activists often struggled to explain their low turnout during protests targeting both Black Africans and Black Tunisians which could stave off their frustration with this *epistemic absence*.

Alternatively, there emerged a heated debate in the public space about irregular Black African migrants in Tunisia as the EU's Trojan Horse, which seeks to get rid of Black African migrants and prevent them from reaching European borders by "dumping" them in North Africa to replace the Tunisian population. These statements have always been employed as heuristics by Saied's strongest supporter, the [Tunisian Nationalist Party](#) (TNP), in its social media videos lambasting the presence of increasing numbers of Black African migrants in Tunisia as a security threat. Within this atmosphere of creeping far-fetched conspiracy theory about the evil design of the "new colonizers", supported by proponents of Afrocentrism in Western Europe and North America to make "North Africa Black", the unsubstantiated figure of one million Black Africans gained traction among many non-black Tunisian supporters of TNP and recuperated by others elsewhere in North Africa. This may leave one wondering whether this figure refers to that of Black Tunisians, mostly concentrated in southern Tunisia and the country's second-largest city, Sfax; but also about Black Tunisians' timid and limited response (and to a lesser extent Black Tunisian activists) to the racist attacks on Black Africans.

This article attempts to focus on the limited scope of Black Tunisian activism and its dynamics, the impact of Saied's inflammatory rhetoric on Black Tunisians, and post-independence Tunisia's official state policy of assimilation

¹ John Feffer, "The 'Great Replacement' Is a Genocidal Playbook", *The Nation*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/white-supremacist-great-replacement/>

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and marginalization of the Black Tunisians. It also looks at what activists are doing to get ahead despite the current political climate and the challenges of a state policy that engaged in a nationwide black hunt campaign.

Black Tunisians' Absence-Presence Dichotomy and the Epistemic Violence of a Silent/Silenced Population

Several factors can account for the absence of Black Tunisians from the public space. The most prominent of them is the general psychological fatigue after Saïed's coup and the ensuing crackdown on civil society activists and organizations. This in turn created a general atmosphere of fear of reprisals and arrests. The Tunisian state's failure to include general education and sensitization on the issue of racism in the Tunisian educational system is another factor.² Yet, the least salient factor for Black Tunisians' silence and invisibility can be explained by Bourguiba's post-independence homogenization policy and its link to the policy of blind racism adopted by the regime to erase race and any other markers of difference among Tunisians, except for a crafted and imaginary collective Tunisian identity, Tunisianness. This form of post-colonial nationalism crafted by the Bourguiba regime that pretended to merge disparate communities into one, known as the *umma*, as in the Tunisian *umma* that Bourguiba imagined in the same way modern Turkey's founder Kemal Atatürk shaped post-Ottoman Turkishness, was guided by the principle of egalitarianism. In reality, it erased any racial, tribal, religious, and ethnic differences, hence excluding minority groups.

By adopting "rigid 'color-blind' national policies", the post-independence Tunisian state's "fundamentalist assimilative project", pursued by Bourguiba and Ben Ali after him, forced nation homogenization through the suppression of the memory of slavery. This was done while failing in destigmatizing this episode in Tunisian history and its impact

2 Since its establishment in 2013, M'nemty organization has been calling on Tunisian authorities for an inclusion of the history of slavery, the values of anti-racism and human rights in the primary and secondary schools, curricula, according to its president, Saadia Mosbah

on Black Tunisians, who never achieved full equality with the majority (i.e., non-black) of the population. This stigma solely affected Black Tunisians, in relation to surnames and the process of their "refinement" and their changing adopted by Bourguiba (following Atatürk's Surname Law in 1934), as the Black slavery stigma was further "reinforced and emphasized", either through patronyms that evoked their slave ancestry, their manumission status or through the reproduction of "client-patron" relationship binding the slave and one's descendants to one's master.³ The color-blind policy also forced people into submitting to an authoritarian model of a homogenous and united nation, in which critique and any form of dissent were seen as seditious. Given their marginalization, Black Tunisians were, therefore, unable to politicize their active mobilization to demand full citizenship and equality for fear of being accused of inciting division. Indeed, under the Ben Ali regime, the issue of anti-black racism was considered an attempt at sowing sedition (*fitna* in Arabic) within the "harmonious" Tunisian society.⁴

This idyllic concept never integrated Black Tunisians as full citizens who found themselves since independence not only marginalized socially and economically but also invisible from any representation be it concrete in the public space or symbolic in the national narrative of prominent Tunisian figures, in the same vein as Tunisian historical figures of the Amazigh and Jewish populations.⁵

3 Afifa Ltifi, "Blacks Tunisians and the Pitfalls of Bourguiba's Homogenization Project", in *Africa and the Middle East: Beyond the Divides*, POMEPS Studies 40, June 2020. <https://pomeps.org/pomeps-studies-40-africa-and-the-middle-east-beyond-the-divides>

4 See Affet Mosbah, "Être Noir en Tunisie", *Jeune Afrique*, 12 July 2004, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/112359/archives-thematique/etre-noire-en-tunisie/>

5 One can cite figures such as Jughurta, a Numidian king, the rulers of the 10th century Berber Zirid dynasty in the famous Queen Dihya (Al Kahina) during Arab invasion of North Africa in the 8th century and contemporary heroes of Tunisian independence such as George Adda, a Tunisian Communist of Jewish origin to name but a few.

Putting the Black Back into the Tunisian Narrative: Doing Away with the Imposed Silence

The glaring absence of Black Tunisians from the collective Tunisian narrative amounts to a form of an epistemic violence that erases their physical presence as well as the oft-ignored history of slavery, to which most are linked through the Trans-Saharan slave trade. This invisibilization was questioned after 2011 when a form of Black Tunisian awakening emerged among Black Tunisian activists, who resorted to oral history and rare and forgotten archival material of Black Tunisian heroes to elevate such figures and build a Black Tunisian narrative and its contribution to Tunisian history.⁶ However, most Black Tunisians are unaware of any positive contribution of Black Tunisian heroes in Tunisia's history, given their limited social, cultural, and economic capital. Indeed, Black Tunisians experienced symbolic violence as marginalized citizens in the Tunisian educational system, especially in university where they felt inadequate in a system that made them internalize their limitations, which inhibited them from risking to defy them.

Indeed, black Tunisians who entered university experienced some form of symbolic violence such as the feeling of inadequacy, being under-estimated, and at times rejection by their peers and professors leading to their isolation and withdrawal, in the first years of their studies. This ultimately led them to internalize their "limited capacities" and become risk-averse in defying the hurdles to the fulfillment of their full potential. While education represented a form of social ascendancy for Black Tunisians, at least in theory, which explains the idyllic image of the generalization and the compulsory character of education in Tunisia, the reality on the ground is different. It is still marked by discrimination, including the deeply anchored image in the south of Black Tunisians as servants (hence the pejorative Tunisian term referring to Blacks as *wessif*), or sharecroppers, which

6 These include figures such as Slim Marzoug and his aborted Black Tunisian rebellion in the city of Gabes in the 1960s. Black Tunisian activist, Maha Abdelhamid, wrote a succinct biography about him in 2011 recorded from long conversations with his family. See Houda Mzioudet, "Breaking the Racial Taboo: Black Tunisian Activism as Transitional Justice", in Simon Robins and Paul Greedy (eds.) *Transitional Justice in Tunisia: Innovations, Continuities, Challenges*, Routledge: 2022.

until recently became less prevalent. This stereotypical image hampers many Black Tunisians from psychologically overcoming their pre-determined condition as subalterns and aspiring to a higher social and educational position irrespective of their skin color.⁷

Faced with a glass ceiling that obstructs them from rising in the social hierarchy, Black Tunisians remained invisible. When they succeed in becoming visible, their elitist character as Black Tunisian activists with a social and academic capital only widened the gap between them and the general Black population.⁸

The history of Black Tunisians remains the missing link in the chain of the official history of Tunisia. Reconstructing this history is a major project which has to be taken seriously by researchers and all components of civil society. "Achieving reconciliation with the African dimension of Tunisia is also one of the challenges that need to be tackled to better understand and accept Tunisian geographical and geopolitical 'identity'."⁹

The nationalistic rhetoric and the color-blind policy only feeds into the collective narrative and further exacerbate nativist ideas about Tunisian identity in Tunisian school where racial diversity is under-represented in school books.¹⁰ This anchored image in the general population psyche empowered many Black Tunisians to mentally overcome their predestined conditions of subalterns and occupy a position that is equal to their "white" Tunisians with whom they can compete. Furthermore, Black Tunisians' invisibilization is heightened

7 Maha Abdelhamid, Amel Elfagi, Moutaa Amin Elwaer, *Être noir ce n'est pas une question de couleur: Rapports d'enquête sur les représentations du racisme chez les noirs de Tunisie*, Nirvana: 2017 (Maha Abdelhamid et al., *Être noir ce n'est pas une question de couleur de peau*). Alternatively, the violence of the racist and discriminatory discourse goes as far as insulting the person who was at the origin of the change that allowed black Tunisians to occupy high professional and social positions that were previously restricted to whites as one interviewee in Abdelhamid et al. recounted an anecdote that happened to her, hearing a southern white woman saying: "damn Bourguiba who allows them to go to school."

8 Maha Abdelhamid et al., *Être noir ce n'est pas une question de couleur de peau*.

9 Marta Scaglioni, *Becoming the Abid: Lives and Social Origins in Southern Tunisia*, Milan: Ledizioni Ledi Publishing, 2020, p. 18. (Marta Scaglioni, *Becoming the Abid*)

10 Through a conversation the author had with M'nemty's president, Saadia Mosbah in March 2018 about primary education school books often representing Tunisians with light-skin, often close to the "Western standards of beauty".

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with their absence on TV, and when visible is through their stereotyping in clown-like, farcical shows¹¹ However, education alone could not account for awareness about racial justice and representation and a general politicization about civic rights to reclaim their full citizenship remains low as a majority of Black Tunisians have only reached high school. For black Tunisian activists, the most effective way for a change in mentalities was started in 2011 through public space mobilization and active lobbying to policy-makers. One prominent event represented a historical landmark was the 2014 black activists march started from the south of Tunisia (Jerba, Zarzis, Medenine, Gabes), stopping at Sfax, reaching Tunis where they went to the Tunisian parliament, met with some ANC (Assembly of National Constituency) members of parliament and one of the activists, Maha Abdelhamid, presented a plea regarding the introduction of race in the upcoming Tunisian constitution.

Attempts at Breaking the Racial Taboo of the Invisibility of Black Tunisians

Before 2011, some Black Tunisians expressed themselves about the insidious and silent character of Tunisian racial discrimination. The first testimony of a Black Tunisian activist was when Affet Mosbah broke the taboo of racism in Tunisia in 2004 and shed light on the reality of being Black in Tunisia,¹² and the subsequent censorship of the magazine issue where the article appeared by the Ben Ali regime.¹³ Affet family's activism predates the Tunisian revolution, which gained them notoriety. She is the sister of singer Slah Mosbah, and sister of Saadia who unsuccessfully attempted to establish Tunisia's first Black Tunisian organization under the Ben Ali regime.¹⁴

Dreaming of a change in Tunisia's racial status quo was

11 Conversation with M'nemty's president, Saadia Mosbah, March 2018.

12 Affet Mosbah, "Être noir en Tunisie", *Jeune Afrique*, 12 July 2004, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/112359/archives-thematique/etre-noire-en-tunisie/>

13 Fatima-Ezzahra Bendami, "Black Tunisians breaking taboos", 2012, Africa is a Country website: <https://africasacountry.com/2021/03/black-tunisians-breaking-taboos>

14 King, Stephen, J. (2021) *Democracy and progress towards racial equality in Tunisia: interview with Zied Rouine*

fulfilled with the Tunisian revolution when early in 2011, the struggle for equality of Black Tunisian citizens with their "white" fellow citizens kicked off. This struggle was part of Tunisia's transition to democracy, the burgeoning of social movements upholding human rights. Black Tunisian activism profited from a climate of loosened censorship in the media and politics. The Arab Spring has allowed a discussion of race and racial issues' impact on human rights despite their neglect by post-2011 academic literature.¹⁵

After 2011, freedom of expression emboldened many Black Tunisian activists, mainly those who had the privilege to have had an education to take the racism question to social media and start discussion forums about it.

The Tunisian revolution was considered a catalyst for more Black Tunisians to join digital activism as the only democratized and easily accessible platform to express themselves. Since traditional media initially shunned the community of activists, social media became the focal point for many Black Tunisians, a virtual meeting safe space where they exchanged their different experiences of racism, discussed ways to get their voices heard in the public space, and mobilize actions on the ground.

Nevertheless, the concept of "Blackness" in Tunisia escapes the rigid notion of essentialization that rests upon the phenotype of the black category. It seems to be a "fluid and slippery concept" in Tunisia, which "rests upon social perceptions rather than tangible, measurable markers."¹⁶ It is usually hard to identify who is black or who is not in Tunisia as skin color is not the only "physical marker."¹⁷ In this respect, Tunisian racial categorization is closer to that of Brazil than that of the USA (and the doctrine of the "one drop rule"). The homogenization process of post-independence Tunisia sought to erase and deny racial and ethnic diversity and impose cultural, linguistic, and religious uniformity for the sake of strengthening the nation-building process. This denial of a diversity strategy is translated into an oppressive policy of suppressing Black Tunisians' voices led by the government, which made them move to the "social periphery" and become socially marginalized.¹⁸

Black Tunisians were excluded from Bourguiba's development projects, like their "white" southern counterparts, given his official policy of denial of race, or any other ethnicity. This led

15 Marta Scaglioni, *Becoming the Abid*, p. 17.

16 Marta Scaglioni, *Becoming the Abid*, p. 192.

17 Marta Scaglioni, *Becoming the Abid*, p. 192.

18 Marta Scaglioni, *Becoming the Abid*, p. 197.

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to their being unrecognized as “black” Tunisians and were not, therefore, “targets of empowerment policies.”¹⁹

Alternatively, the monopolizing character of Tunis as the main center of anti-black racism activism, left Black Tunisians in the south, where the majority are concentrated, fighting discrimination on their own in their towns and villages. This explains the lack of enthusiasm of a big section of the Black population in the south mainly in the small towns and villages of Medenine and Jerba for the 2013 march that attempted to connect activists in the north to the Black population in this south. Indeed, Black Tunisian activism has struggled to integrate all Black Tunisia, in the same vein other Tunisian social movements, including feminist and LGBTQI movements mobilized for the communities since 2011. The challenge remains in southern Tunisians due to the lack of national media coverage of the region and their historical socio-economic marginalization.

But You’re Not Like Them: Killing the Black in the Tunisian, Escaping One’s African Identity

Even before the recent attacks on Black African migrants, Black Tunisians often tended to adopt a carefree attitude towards them, under the pretext that such attacks do not concern them. When in 2016, Congolese students were stabbed by a light-skinned Tunisian in downtown Tunis, a protest drew mostly non-Black Tunisians and Black Africans, many of whom were from the different French-speaking African student communities.²⁰ Similarly, when the worldwide

19 Black Tunisians did not benefit from social mobility opportunities that were afforded to “white” Tunisians and even Jewish Tunisians (there was a Jewish minister in Bourguiba’s cabinet). The only black political high official during the rule of Bourguiba is Taieb Sahbani who was Minister of State of Foreign Affairs. In diplomacy, Bechir Gueblaoui was Tunisia’s ambassador to Addis Ababa in the 1960s and 1970s and only black Tunisian ambassador. His daughter Souad Gueblaoui is currently Tunisia’s ambassador in La Valetta (Malta). Cited in Ines Mrad-Dali, “Les mobilisations des noirs tunisiens au lendemain de la révolte de 2011: Entre affirmation d’une identité historique et défense d’une cause noire”, *Politique Africaine*, 2015/4 (no. 140), pp. 61-81, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2015-4-page-61.htm>

20 The author attended the protest. When the president of the Ivorian

wave of protests against the death of George Floyd reached Tunisia in June 2020, only the prominent Black Tunisian organization, M’nemty, as well as other Tunisian civil society and human rights organizations attended the protest with Black African migrants in Tunisia.

The only Black Tunisian activist work of M’nemty organization and its president, Saadia Mosbah, continues to face monumental hurdles including challenges to its work as a small organization, with smear campaigns and thinly veiled and open online threats against them by supporters of the Tunisian president and the Tunisian Nationalist Party. This may explain the reason many Black Tunisians have been keeping a low profile, in light of the not propitious context of further protest and open revolt. Moreover, following President Saied’s racist speech, M’nemty received complaints of racially motivated verbal and physical attacks against four Black Tunisian women and the racial profiling of a Black Tunisia man by a Sfax police patrol. Another incident involved a Black Tunisian family accosted by police in the south of Tunisia and asked for their I.Ds. While such incidents were seen as not serious by some Black Tunisians, dismissing them as an excess zeal, they represent a dangerous escalation since Saied’s speech criminalizing anyone who looks Black African where Black Tunisians are at the receiving end of close scrutiny and arbitrary arrests from law enforcement officers. More alarmingly is the feeling of insecurity in one’s country as a Black Tunisian, adding to an already feeling of being treated as second-class citizens through occasional to daily verbal attacks that had become normalized despite legal protection for victims of racial harassment for Black people with Law 50-2018.

Moreover, Black Tunisians often lack the resources and the means to assert themselves as full citizens when mobilizing against discrimination affecting their community. This is mostly due to their historical marginalization and deprivation. Civil society activists, both black and non-black, have drawn attention to the importance of giving a platform and voice to the concerned community that is often at the receiving end of racial violence. While this can be lauded as a recognition of the impact of the invisibilization of Black Tunisians in the public space and consequently their hushed voices regarding race-related issues touching both black and sub-Saharan Africans in Tunisia, it should also draw attention to the timid and small mobilization of local civil society activists in the south of Tunisia with black African migrants.²¹

community in Tunisia was killed in December 2018, a few Black Tunisian activists from M’nemty organization attended.

21 Through my interview of two female black Tunisian activists in August 2020 from Zarzis, one who is working as a psychologist with black African migrants and the other one, with a local organization empow-

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On another note, some Black Tunisian activists took to social media and used black humor by launching a campaign where they stuck their Tunisian ID card and passport on their heads, amid a campaign titled “Carrying my papers because you never know”, to draw attention to the absurdity of racial profiling to which Tunisian authorities have subjected Black Tunisians, adding to the general paranoia that they are, like Black Africans, guilty until proven innocent.²² Until the Tunisian state upholds its commitment to applying the law against any harassment and abuse targeting Black people in Tunisia as a signatory to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1967, and through Law 50 in 2018, Black Tunisians and others continue to be criminalized due to an ignorance of the presence of dark-skinned citizens by many light-skinned Tunisians.

Conclusion

Through the insistence on the xenophobic character of the attacks, this gives a justification that pan-African solidarity is a foreign concept in the context of increasing populist, hyper-nationalist discourse in Tunisia since Saied’s coup and the attendant conspiracy theory about the enemy within, i.e. black African migrants as exogenous to Tunisia and therefore to black Tunisians. Even before Saied’s rhetoric, the separation of the plight of black Africans from that of Black Tunisians alienates Black Tunisians even further from the continent.

The forced amnesia of the racial taboo, the Tunisian state’s selective-collective memory is tantamount to the dictatorship’s basic tools of collective amnesia about decades of systemic human rights violations, torture, and abuse of dissenting voices. It forces an identification with the official narrative about a fictitious, superficial Tunisianness.

Additionally, fear heightened the further ostracization of Black Tunisians and pushed many of them to normalize with structural, state-led racism in the current climate of the government’s oppression of the dissenting voices of political opponents. Black Tunisians remain the tree that hides the forest whose plight is often overshadowed by that of Black African migrants and thus became the collateral damage of Saied’s anti-immigrant rhetoric. However, Black Tunisian

ering black African female migrants and their inclusion in the local community. In fact, she presented a project to Zarzis municipality to use get access to one of its premises to use it as training space for female migrants in sewing, agriculture etc.

22 The author took part in the campaign (in article published in France 24 English in March 2023.

activists call for ending this invisibility by challenging the status quo about their marginalized population.

Between the Tunisian Nationalist Party’s hyper-nationalism and anti-Africanism and the constant yearning for a full-citizenship, Black Tunisians are caught between a rock and a hard place, in the context of the emergence and development of Black Tunisian activism followed by a racial backlash from TNP’s nationalist and anti-black discourse, endorsed by President Saied.

Out of this gloomy picture, it is important to highlight the often-forgotten work of southern black Tunisian civil society activists in their respective communities. Since 2011, they have gained enough confidence to devise pragmatic and effective strategies that proved to have broken the isolation of their communities and their ability to empower themselves, owing to the opening up of the civil society space and their leverage in their community through building a relationship of trust and communication about their demands.

Some recommendations from direct and indirect contact and observation of Black Tunisian civil society activists in the south can serve as starting points for engaging in a conversation between different communities and empowering Black Tunisian activists. These can include the following:

- Mobilizing educational resources in schools to sensitize Tunisians from a young age to the damage of anti-black racism on black Tunisians and doing away with the normalization of any form of racial discrimination in media outlets, schools, workplace, etc., be it subtle or overt. The work of M’nemty organization is commendable in this respect.
- The need to reverse the tendency that sometimes gaslights Black Tunisians from expressing themselves on social media or the public space about their individual experiences of discrimination, especially after the February 2023 hate campaign on Black Africans and its direct effect on them through indiscriminate attacks on anyone who looked “Black African”, by allowing them to speak out about the danger of racial profiling.
- Working collaboratively with local radio stations in Tunisia (in southern Tunisia in particular, such as Radio Nefzawa [Kebili], Ulysse FM [Jerba], etc. and Sub-Saharan African radio stations such as “Radio Libre Francophone”,²³ which has been working, since Saied’s speech, by building bridges between different sub-Saharan African communities and Tunisians.
- Undoing the normalization of the absence of Black Tunisians in the public space and general debate

23 RLF Radio Libre Francophone Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/RLFLibreFrancophone/>

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about racism, to counter xenophobic groups such as the *Tunisian Nationalist Party* that can co-opt Black Tunisians into their hate rhetoric by pitting them against Black Africans and marginalize them as passive citizens through separating their struggle from that of Black Africans.

- Supporting civil society organizations' initiatives that educate the general public about trans-racial/transnational solidarity between Black Tunisians and Black Africans as both are tied by the same fate given their marginalized situation.
- Highlight the importance of prevention when it comes to cases of race-related hate crimes and discriminatory

practices. This can be done in collaboration with Black Tunisian and sub-Saharan African activists (among the student population such as the Association of Sub-Saharan African Students and Trainees, AESAT),²⁴ as well as legal experts including lawyers who have been working on the implementation of Law 50-2018.

²⁴ Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Africains en Tunisie (AESAT) Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/AESAT.Officielle/>

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About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.



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