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Cover Page Footnote

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Farah Dewedar¹

Abstract

History speaks to the enslavement, discrimination and inhumane treatment of black people due to their skin color. Regardless of the myriad civil rights laws set to protect black people against segregation, racism persists at a global level. According to the UNHCR, in 2021 Egypt served as a host country to an estimated 107,578 registered black African refugees. Despite Egyptians themselves having a range of skin colors, racism against black people persists. The 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which originated in the U.S., captured global attention after the violent deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The movement was successful in raising awareness, through the support and involvement of black celebrities, to the legal rights of black Americans promoting the right to demand justice. In comparison, Egypt has not witnessed any BLM protests or activity, which can be attributed to three main factors: the absence of audible black voices, media censorship and lack of awareness. This paper intends to analyze the possible factors which lead to a successful movement through a comparative study of Egypt and the U.S. in an attempt to understand racial injustice and the absence of BLM in Egypt.

Keywords

Black Lives Matter (BLM); African Refugees; Racism; Blackface

Racial injustice has always had a place on the global stage and power to ignite revolutions even during a global pandemic. In May 2020, George Floyd, a black African American, fell victim to a fatal police brutality incident, at the hands of white Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin, for allegedly using counterfeit money (Barrie 1). This incident was the breaking point that retriggered BLM protests demanding justice for Floyd and the many others who have suffered from police brutality due to their skin color. The BLM movement originated in 2013, co-founded by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors, as a reaction to systemic racism and has used social media as a catalyst to the movement. The violent death of Floyd re-sparked the movement internationally from Africa to Asia to Australia and evoked a set of BLM protests amid a major pandemic. This was evident through an analysis of data collected from Internet search engines pertaining to the search term 'racism' in thirty-two languages and from 101 countries (Barrie 1). The findings revealed an apparent peak in searches related to racism from May 25th, the death of Floyd, and the following two weeks (Barrie 2-3). Despite these findings, the BLM movement was noticeably missing in Egypt, where black deaths go unnoticed. Fortunately, a year after Floyd's death, Chauvin was prosecuted and sentenced to twenty-two and a half years in prison with charges of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter (Andone and Razek).

On the other hand, in Egypt in 2017, South Sudanese school teacher, Gabriel Tut was assaulted and murdered by an Egyptian xenophobe who went unpunished (El-Mahdawy). Tut's death received minimal, if any, media coverage and was hardly considered a major social issue. Accordingly, Floyd and Tut's deaths received remarkably different responses, which can be attributed to the absence of the elements necessary for combating racism. The limited social and political movements supporting the rights of black people in Egypt is a result of the absence

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of black voices in Egypt, media censorship and lack of awareness.² These issues are compounded by the large community of African refugees and asylum seekers illegally residing in the country who do not have the power to fight for their rights through BLM protests. This paper intends to analyze the possible factors which lead to a successful movement through a comparative study of Egypt and the US in an attempt to understand racial injustice and the absence of BLM in Egypt.

Egyptian Identity

Egypt is located in Africa, has close cultural, language, and religious connection with the Middle East and has a long history of European colonialism. This has led to a complex identity for Egyptians being labeled as African, Middle Eastern, Arab or White, yet many often simply identify as 'Egyptian'. In 2020, the census administration in the U.S. altered their racial categories and removed the dedicated category to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which included Egypt, and instead aggregated it with the 'white' category (Azim). This categorization can be confusing to many Egyptians who do not identify as white. The National Geographic Genographic Project (NGGP) has analyzed DNA samples of people from all around the world in an attempt to uncover the origins of the different nationalities. This project showed that Egyptians are 68% indigenous to North Africa, 17% Arab, 4% Jewish Diaspora, 3% Eastern Africa, 3% Asia Minor and 3% Southern Europe (El-Behary). Others identify Egyptians as Africans due to the geographical location of the country, whilst some identify them as Middle Eastern or Arab due to religion, language, culture and years of Arab ruling. Whilst non-Egyptians identify Egyptians according to their own preconceived notions, how do Egyptians identify themselves?

A study conducted in 2007 investigated how Egyptians perceive and identify themselves and discovered that most identify as 'Arab Muslim', 'Egyptian' or 'descendants of the Pharaohs', yet none of the respondents viewed themselves as Africans (Amin). Such responses could be attributed to the division of Africa into North Africa (white, Arab, Middle Eastern or Islamic), and Sub-Saharan Africa (black and African) (Amin). However, why do Egyptians choose to associate themselves with Arabs but not Africans? Most historians believe that this is attributed to the many years of colonialism in Egypt by white rulers, such as the Europeans or Ottomans, which created the notion that the elite community is made up of light-skinned individuals whilst the domestic laborers and lower social class are black (Ghoneim; Zaineldine). This is further supported by Pan-Arabism, which was advocated by the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s (Amin). By positioning Egypt within the Arab world, it provides Egyptians with a multitude of opportunities of education and work in Arab countries. This was indeed achieved as an estimated 86% of Egyptian migrants reside in Arab countries in comparison to others ("Distribution of Egyptian Migrants"). This has incorporated the traditions of Gulf countries into Egyptian society, hence making it easier to associate with Arabs due to similarities in culture, language and religion. It is evident that Arab countries are associated with wealth and rich culture, whilst African countries are associated with poverty, starvation, strange traditions and enslavement. As a result, Egyptians are more likely to identify as Arab rather than African as many believe it presents them positively.

² Throughout this paper, the term 'black' will be used to refer to dark-skinned individuals in Egypt since this is the term used by the majority of Egyptians; however, this does not refer to the race or ethnicity of the individuals

African Refugees in Egypt

According to the UNHCR, in 2021 Egypt served as a host country to a total of 267,734 refugees and asylum seekers of different nationalities: specifically, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. The aforementioned number is not entirely accurate as it does not take into consideration the unregistered asylum seekers, the number of which is forecasted to be significantly higher. Many of the forced migrants experience xenophobia in Egypt, however black Africans are especially victims of prejudice in comparison to other nationalities (Eltahawy). Most non-black refugees in Egypt are Syrians who constitute 135,239 individuals as of 2021 (UNHCR Egypt). While it is true that Syrians experience a degree of hostility, it is incomparable to the suffering and hardship faced by black Africans. This is evident in the fact that Syrians have still managed to start up their own businesses, especially in the food industry, as well as receive employment under the minimum wage law (Meghid). In 2016, Syrians contributed more than USD 800 million to the Egyptian economy, however that number is estimated to be significantly higher in the current day (Noureldin). Africans on the other hand, are deprived from such opportunities, which poses a challenge “when trying to access justice, obtain jobs, find accommodation and just live everyday life” (Eltahawy). Whilst Syrians are capable of making a considerable living from their businesses in Egypt, allowing them to spend far more than the average Egyptian, Africans do not have access to education nor formal employment (Meghid). The experiences of Africans in Egypt serve as substantial evidence that their skin color poses an obstacle to living a normal life.

Lack of Opportunities

Contemporary Egypt shares commonality with the 1960s American South in terms of the education and employment opportunities accessible to black people. The majority of black non-Egyptian residents in Egypt are African asylum seekers and refugees who are unable to enroll in public schools nor work in the formal economy. African refugees have already been stripped of basic human rights and have escaped the civil war and poor living conditions in their home country. Therefore, they cannot afford the fees of private schools and, unfortunately, they are denied enrollment in Egyptian public schools. African refugees are considered to have temporary residency, according to the government, therefore further limiting their access to education. Even though there are acknowledged refugee schools, they are limited, hence making it difficult for African refugees to obtain secondary education (Columb, *Disqualified Bodies* 290). Furthermore, many African refugees are unable to apply for work visas due to their high cost and difficulty; work permits in Egypt typically require that the applicant has unique skills that are unavailable in the Egyptian market (Columb, *Disqualified Bodies* 291). In most cases, these conditions are unattainable by African refugees. Moreover, the status of refugees is dependent on the political and economic atmosphere in Egypt as well as the relationship between the refugees’ country, therefore creating unstable living conditions for refugees (Milad). Racial prejudice is further amplified by the common misconception that refugees represent competitors and are seen as an obstacle for the country to flourish instead of positive contributors to the economy (Eltahawy et al. 16). Consequently, Africans are resented for the economic difficulties faced by the large number of poor families in Egypt instead of directing these concerns towards official authorities (Columb, *Disqualified Bodies* 298). Like the U.S., prior to the Civil Rights movement, the laws in Egypt currently do not explicitly prohibit black African refugees from receiving education, however the system is designed to implicitly achieve this. As a result, facing racial prejudice becomes more challenging without access to education as demonstrated by the absence of BLM in Egypt.

In October 2021, the UNHCR reported 107, 578 African refugees and asylum seekers to exist in Egypt. However, the number of unregistered African migrants is estimated to exceed

a million. Those refugees generally report that they face inhumane treatment in their everyday lives. For instance, Sudanese women are faced with sexual harassment, rape, abuse and forced prostitution (Edward 6, 13). Bahja, a 37-year-old Sudanese mother, who left her village due to mass genocide, reported on her experience as a black woman in Egypt (Eltahawy et al. 2). Alongside the daily verbal harassment faced by Bahja due to her skin color, during a medical checkup Bahja was kicked out of the hospital. In pursuit of understanding the reason behind a radically different treatment, she was bombarded with the response “we are not the same. You’re black and I’m white and you should get out of our country” (Eltahawy et al. 15). This correlates to the story of Mariam, a 17-year-old Sudanese lady who sought refuge in Egypt after her village was set on fire. She describes that Egyptians would commonly refuse to sit next to a black person because they perceive black as dirty. They are referred to using derogatory slurs, such as ‘slave’ and ‘chocolate’ (Eltahawy). This abusive treatment has created psychological repercussions for African refugees and other black skinned individuals in Egypt, especially the youth due to their vulnerability (Henry 597). One might argue that this treatment is a result of the socioeconomic status of most black people in Egypt; however, it is evident that, irrespective of their status and ethnicity, black people in Egypt are treated with disdain due to their skin color. For instance, a black American Youtuber Sunny Ville visited Egypt in 2018 and stated that she often received strange glances from locals during her stay. Especially during her visit to the pyramids whereby a group of Egyptians made ‘monkey noises’ whilst staring at her (Ville, 2:18-3:25). On the same YouTube video, some people have commented that despite being fully Egyptian, they are bullied and discriminated against due to their darker complexions. This is a common phenomenon whereby many Egyptians, specifically females, are viewed as ugly and suffer from racial slurs (Shalaby). Accordingly, it is evident that the issue is not race or ethnicity, it is color. Unlike most black people in the U.S., African refugees in Egypt do not have the tools, such as education and citizenship rights, to enable them to overcome those issues. As a result, they are forced to work as cleaners and beggars which does not cover their living expenses and forces them to be victims of sex and organ trafficking (2021 Trafficking in Persons Report). Furthermore, due to the vulnerability of African refugees in Egypt, they are prime candidates for organ traffickers and brokers.

Organ Trafficking

Organ trafficking in Egypt has failed to gain the media’s attention, specifically when associated with African refugees, despite its prevalence. In 2020, an article written by *Egypt Today*, one of the oldest Egyptian magazines, discussed the arrest of organ traffickers in Egypt (Ali). Yet it failed to recognize that many these victims are African refugees. Africans are an attainable target for Egyptian brokers as they are the most vulnerable since most of them have “expired passports, invalid visas, and no work permits” (Columb, *Organ Trafficking in Egypt*). Additionally, many are undocumented and are at risk of being arrested and deported (Columb, *Disqualified Bodies* 296). Even those who are in the country legally, are not sufficiently compensated and are unable to pay rent and cover daily expenses (Columb, *Disqualified Bodies* 290). Accordingly, they are forced to accept the offers made by organ traffickers. Young Africans, typically Sudanese or Eritrean, are targeted by brokers in Egypt who offer them a tempting proposal. The brokers approach African refugees and promise them a passage from Egypt to Europe whereby they will lead promising lives, yet for a colossal price that they cannot afford (Columb, *Organ Trafficking in Egypt*). However, the brokers propose organ selling to cover the expenses of migration from the coasts of Egypt to Europe. These African refugees have already escaped their home countries with no hope to return as they are plagued with starvation and civil wars. Accordingly, their only hope is to travel to Europe for a chance at survival. In most other cases, undocumented Sudanese asylum seekers are victims of organ

trafficking due to debts owed to smugglers who have assisted them to cross the border to Egypt and provided them with food and housing. Smugglers have contacts with organ traffickers and accordingly arrange for organ donations (Budiani-Saberi and Columb 900). African refugees are left with no choice but to accept in order to pay their debts and to protect their families. Unfortunately, the donors are unaware of the risks associated with the surgery which may result in death. Moreover, after refugees undergo major surgery, the brokers turn out to be swindlers who do not uphold their end of the agreement (Budiani-Saberi and Columb 900). Some of the refugees are even threatened and forced into their organ donation. Other brokers who hold up their end of the agreement are not concerned with the safety of the passengers, as they may end up in detention centers and are only released if they sell their bodies for sex (Columb, *Organ Trafficking in Egypt*). Since African refugees do not have rights in Egypt, their attempts at reporting the incidents to the authorities only result in threats of deportation or death (2021 Trafficking in Persons Report). This is attributed to the absence of a mechanism to protect victims of organ trafficking such as confidentiality and offerings of temporary residency or financial support (Budiani-Saberi and Columb 899). The victims' lives are further complicated as they are unable to seek medical care in fear of being deported once physicians see their surgery scars (Budiani-Saberi and Columb 907). Even though these transplants are illegal and there are laws that are set to prevent them from happening, these laws are not well-established and have loopholes in them, hence organ trafficking continues to be an imperative issue in Egypt (Budiani-Saberi and Columb 898). Despite the struggles faced by many black people in Egypt, there was no corresponding upheaval nor any sign of support towards the BLM movement. This can be attributed to historical events in Egypt, such as the 2005 Mostafa Mahmoud Park Incident, which have made African refugees reluctant to participate in fear of their lives.

Mostafa Mahmoud Park Incident

The 1960s American Civil Rights movement, triggered by the inability of black Americans to assume their basic human rights, was a successful step towards achieving racial equality and set the stage of victory for the 2020 BLM movement. In Egypt, the 2005 Mostafa Mahmoud Park protest represented Egypt's sole black demonstration, in which black Sudanese refugees protested for three months at the Mostafa Mahmoud Park near the UNHCR office in Egypt demanding their rights as listed in the Geneva convention (Whitaker). The protestors strategically managed themselves through appointing leaders who assigned roles to everyone based on their capabilities (Rowe 5). They were collectively informed about all arrangements or plans of action and played an active role in decision-making, therefore creating a democratic atmosphere and empowering each and every protestor (Rowe 6). The protestors stayed past the deadline set to evacuate the park and most of foreign media had left (Rowe 7). Consequently, the Egyptian police cleared the park leading to over 20 announced deaths, however the number is estimated to be significantly higher (Whitaker). Nevertheless, shortly after the incident the Egyptian media had reported that the protestors commenced the attack on the police and that the main cause of death was due to a stampede, however some foreign reporters who had stayed made conflicting claims (Whitaker). These claims include reporting the absence of a stampede and emphasizing that the police deliberately "aimed mainly at the heads, kidneys and genital parts of male and female refugees alike" which was evident from their corpses which had corresponding wounds (Dadrian). Furthermore, over 2,000 forced migrants were arrested as a result of their alleged violence whilst many mysteriously disappeared. During the protests, both the Egyptian media had focused their efforts on falsely portraying the Sudanese refugees as chaotic individuals lacking hygiene and engaging in multiple reckless activities such as drinking (Rowe 5). The details of the incident remain unclear as the Egyptian media issued

statements which contradicted foreign media sources as well as witness testimonies. Consequently, victory was not achieved by the protestors due to the censored media, absence of distinct black voices and lack of racial prejudice awareness, as well as the exclusion of black Sudanese forced migrants from education. This occurrence is comparable to the American Civil Rights movement; however, it was capable of successfully achieving basic human rights for black Americans in the South through the appointment of an audible black voice: Martin Luther King Jr (Mulhall 248). Through being a powerful and educated leader, he was able to organize the march from Selma to Montgomery and achieve media coverage which was essential in broadcasting the racial segregation ongoing in the American South to Northern Americans. Hence, the media is fundamental and indispensable to the success of movements, especially in the modern day. It had an undeniable influence on the success of both the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and 21st century BLM movements.

Media Coverage

In the current modern era, the media in all its forms has become an essential tool in connecting people all around the world and organizing social movements. These media outlets include social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube), television (series, films, movies and talk-shows), newspapers and the internet. Through investigating the availability of these media outlets in both the U.S. and Egypt, an understanding of why the BLM movement was noticeably missing in Egypt can be achieved.

Media Coverage in The U.S.

The aforementioned media outlets are easily accessible to the majority of the population in the U.S. and are utilized in order to spread awareness on the social injustice faced by black people. For instance, social media heavily supported the 2020 BLM movement, which originated in the U.S. and helped spread it worldwide. This was achieved through the availability of groups, videos and posts which allowed people to voice their opinions and narrate their stories regarding racial injustice. Furthermore, videos of celebrities, such as Jennifer Lopez, Ariana Grande and Madonna, in BLM protests circulated the internet and encouraged people to participate (Ahlgrim and Torres). These events were further broadcasted by news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *NBC News* and *ABC News* in order to reach an even wider audience and were mainly broadcasted in English, which is spoken by approximately 78% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau). Furthermore, there is an abundance of scholarly literature available on racism in the U.S. and in fact, just a year after Floyd's death, there are already published academic journal articles on the matter such as "George Floyd (October 14, 1973-May 25, 2020): Make Future Public Health Better Than the Past" by Michael Fine published in the *American Journal of Public Health* and "Race differences in public satisfaction with and trust in the local police in the context of George Floyd protests: An analysis of residents' experiences and attitudes" by Daniel K. Pryce and Randy Gainey in the *Criminal Justice Studies Journal*. Social media, the internet and newspapers are also supported by television through talk shows, movies and series that tackle racial injustice. Television in the U.S. plays a big role in the representation of the struggles faced by black people in their daily lives. For instance, medical-based drama series, such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *New Amsterdam*, discuss the healthcare issues and systemic racism in the U.S. that white counterparts do not face (Gelman; Dugan). Furthermore, series such as *Lucifer*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Clickbait*, shed light on white privilege, police brutality and the day-to-day struggles of the characters due to their skin color. The aforementioned series have millions of viewers, and they feature black actors and/or actresses, which makes it easier to

incorporate their stories and struggles. Although these series are not centered towards issues of race they do attempt to raise awareness around the issue when possible. In addition, a large number of movies and series centered around racial injustice are constantly produced such as *In The Heat of The Night*, *Get Out*, *The Hate U Give* and *When They See Us*. Well-known talk-shows such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon* have all dedicated segments to discussing the 2020 BLM protests and other racial injustices that happen. Whilst racial injustice in the U.S. remains a major issue, the availability of many accessible media sources makes it easier for people to voice their concerns and share their stories of racial injustice whether through social media posts or through television. On the contrary, Egyptian media outlets are heavily restricted and do not broadcast issues faced by black people in Egypt.

Media Coverage in Egypt

Compared to the massive media coverage available in the U.S., Egyptians encounter minimal media coverage pertaining to racial injustice. This can be attributed to the limited and censored media in the country. Local news outlets such as newspapers and talk shows do not cover stories concerning racism in the country. For instance, in 2017 Gabriel Tut's death went unnoticed and received minimal media coverage, as there were very few articles written about the incident. Furthermore, African refugees remain victims to organ trafficking, yet there are limited local articles discussing the issue. Even worse, in 2014 the local newspaper *Youm7* published an article on the front page with the headline "Niggers: Black Terror Gangs in Cairo", as shown in Figure 1. The article showed a picture of black children holding guns and stated that South Sudanese teenagers committed 115 criminal incidents (Frenkel). Although the article included factual incidents, it promoted xenophobia and racism. There was insufficient backlash towards *Youm7* as there was almost no local coverage of the matter. Accordingly, it is effortless for Egyptians to claim that racism does not ensue in their country due to the incompetence of local newspapers in accurate media coverage. Luckily, some blogging websites such as *Egyptian Streets* and *CairoScene* have recently started to recognize the struggles faced by black people in Egypt and have reported on them. However, these websites often write articles in English, which is spoken by an estimated 35% of the Egyptian population, therefore having minimal coverage (Euromonitor International 125). These websites are also not as established and reputable, in comparison to the well-known newspapers such as *Al-Shorouq* and *Al-Ahram*. Furthermore, a large number of news outlets, such as *Medium*, *Huffington Post* and *Human Rights Watch* are blocked in Egypt due to their critical reporting of the Egyptian state.

The news fed to Egyptians through television also plays a big role in their perception of black people. In 2016, Nubian football player Ahmed El-Merghany was described as a servant and doorman on public television by Mortada Mansour, famous Egyptian lawyer (Gaweesh). Similarly, in 2021, black Egyptian football player Shikabala was a victim to racial slurs by the football audience during a match (Ismail). This behavior can be attributed to the stereotype of Nubians or any black individual in Egypt who is the low social class servant as portrayed by the character Othman in old Egyptian cinema. Such incidents have also been concealed and there have been minimal concerns towards them. Accordingly, when it comes to racial injustice in Egypt, or even around the world, Egyptians have minimal, if any, media coverage. Perhaps, this is attributed to the lack of sympathy and engagement with the BLM movement and other racial matters, as the media presents them inadequately and poorly.

Despite the fact that the Egyptian media has not engaged with the struggles of black people in Egypt, there are a multitude of other media outlets available to people globally. Those include foreign films aired on local television channels such as MBC 2 or widely popular

streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. Furthermore, social media posts shared by American celebrities and influencers are readily available to all Egyptians, yet there is limited support towards the BLM movement in contrast to other uprisings. For example, many Egyptians support the Palestinian cause, which is undeniably important, however comparable support towards the BLM movement is absent. (Salem). Over the years, Egyptians have consistently shown their support towards Palestinians through social media, protests and massive boycotting of companies that support Israel. In 2019, Egyptian students at the American University in Cairo (AUC) organized a walkout during a talk by a former U.S. Ambassador of Israel, which later escalated into a march on the university's campus upholding banners and showing support for the Gaza cause (*Middle East Monitor*). In comparison, AUC students have shown contradictory behavior towards the BLM movement. Although some of the upper-class Egyptians, mainly AUC students, have shown support towards the BLM movement through using the appropriate hashtags and changing their profile pictures to Floyd or the BLM movement, some have only done this as an act of performative support to maintain their status quo (Ghoneim). This is evident in a Facebook post by an AUC student calling for action in support of the BLM movement that received backlash as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Most of the comments argued that this is not Egyptians' fight and more pressing issues should be prioritized. Even though the BLM movement originated in the U.S., it has global implications, yet many Egyptians still perceive the BLM movement to be an American problem, which should not be interfered with. Unfortunately, many students seem unaware of the fact that racism persists in their country and are oblivious to the hardships faced by African refugees in Egypt due to their skin color. Accordingly, many Egyptians have clearly sided with Palestinians; however, they have failed to fight for the rights of fellow black African refugees in Egypt or Nubians on many occasions. This could be attributed to the fact that Pan-Arabism had a powerful impact on Egypt in comparison to Pan-Africanism

Issues of social importance are highly debated on social media platforms, whereas BLM discussions encountered skewed reactions by Egyptians. Typically, Egyptians have the tendency to overlook race-related issues through two main justifications: emphasizing the relative importance of other issues or denying the existence of anti-black racism. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics CAPMAS, it is currently estimated that 29.7% of Egyptians live in poverty. Such a staggering rate is often cited as justification to condone racial discrimination since more pressing issues persist. There has been a lack of media coverage for issues involving race. For example, Egyptians paid little tribute to George Floyd's death or Iman Saleh's suicide back in 2018. The 18-year-old undergraduate Alexandrian student, Saleh, committed suicide after being bullied for years due to her dark complexion (Abdulaal). Saleh's death went unnoticed without garnering any consideration. Even though a vast number of Egyptians have completely overlooked BLM discussions, others who have decided to engage in such discussions tended to side with the All-Lives Matter view. This perhaps demonstrates Egyptians' failure to recognize the criticality of the BLM movement due to the lack of awareness spread towards the topic. The Egyptian media has overlooked the essence of the cause and the peaceful protests and has focused its efforts on presenting the vandalism and looting that had occurred in the U.S. during the protests (*Al-Monitor*). Accordingly, the core value of the cause vanishes due to such biased and incomplete reports confirming and reinforcing the animalistic blackface portrayals of black people (Sabry). In accordance, the dehumanization of individuals with a dark complexion is induced and normalized to the extent that the severity of racial slurs and derogatory remarks is completely disregarded by the majority of Egyptians.

Blackface and The Entertainment Industry

One of the many ways in which the media has disparaged and derided global discrimination against black people is through centuries of endorsement of blackface. Blackface, the art of darkening a white actor's face, has been historically used in film and theater as a form of caricature of black people (Abate). It has been used in vaudeville, silent films and global cinema to depict black people as "lazy, ignorant, hypersexual, thieving, and cowardly" (Marquis). Furthermore, it has been used in order to explain the racial dynamics by justifying the distribution of wealth and power along racial lines (Thelwell 66-67). Blackface gained massive popularity among white people as it affirmed their superiority and power whilst allowing them to dehumanize the black community to justify violence, slavery and cruelty against them (Abate). As a reaction to movements demanding equality and justice for black lives, blackface was used before the 1960s civil rights movement in the U.S. as a weapon to derogate their efforts and to hinder affirmative actions (Lartey; Brundage 45). Films depicting blackface such as *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and *Birth Of A Nation* (1915) were vastly popular, however the usage of blackface went into a massive decline after the civil rights movement (Abate). *Birth Of A Nation*, in specific, played a role in the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) due to its depiction of free black people as animals and rapists (Lartey). As a result of the recent BLM movements, a significant number of television productions have removed scenes and even entire episodes which portrayed blackface due to the negative, unrealistic and offensive portrayal of the black community (Alter). In 2019, the governor of Alabama, Kay Ivey, issued a public apology for wearing blackface as a college student in 1967, which caused public fury demanding her resignation (Fausset). Consequently, this demonstrates growing awareness and understanding of the detrimental repercussions caused by offensive and grotesque portrayals of the black community which eventually leads to the support of calls for equality. Similarly, the BLM movement strives for racial justice and is able to achieve this through unity.

Acts of racial mockery are not recognized as destructive by the majority of Egyptians, hence underestimating the depth of the issue. Despite, and perhaps because, the Egyptian complexion is a range of hues, a sense of superiority and power are achieved through characterizing black people as animalistic and uncivilized. As a result, emphasizing that non-black Egyptians, on the contrary, are "civilized, human, desirable" (Lartey). In Egypt in 2019, the prank show *Shaklabaz* featured the Egyptian actress Shaima Saif in blackface as a Sudanese woman terrorizing minibus passengers by inappropriate behavior such as attempting to steal their phones and drinking alcohol (Marquis). Stating that "the black person is lazy.... or they're lying on a bed, always falling asleep," Saif attempted to justify her representation as comedic and accurate (Walsh, "*Blackface*"). Saif, like many other Egyptians, has failed to see the impact of this portrayal on Sudanese individuals, especially that they were facing a revolution in their country which speaks to their strength and refusal to accept corruption (Marquis). Saif is not the only perpetrator of blackface in Egyptian television and film as countless incidents of blackface are documented, such as the 2018 Egyptian comedy show *Azmi and Ashgan*. The show featured lead actors in blackface as well as black servants practicing sorcery (Marquis). Other movies such as *Saedy Fel Gamaa El Amricia* (1998), *Africano* (2001) and *Eyal Habeeba* (2005) are some of the most popular Egyptian movies that use blackface and/or mock African culture. These movies continue to be aired on almost all Egyptian television channels and have not been reprimanded for their offensiveness. Furthermore, in 2020 a YouTube couple, Ahmed and his wife Zainab, were arrested for posting a video whereby they 'pranked' their one-year-old baby through appearing in blackface. The video showed their daughter terrified and crying, whilst her parents were laughing and joking (*Egypt Today*). This event caught the attention of the public eye as it went viral on social media and many blogs and news outlets have written about it. However, unfortunately they failed to mention the offensiveness of such behavior and

instead only focused on the parents' negligence as the couple were charged with exploiting their daughter to gain more subscribers. Although blackface did not originate in Egypt, it continues to enjoy widespread popularity as opposed to other countries who have realized the serious impact of it. The disregard of BLM and racial equality is part of a vicious cycle in which the media tends to overlook racially insensitive incidents due to Egyptians' lack of interest in the matter which in return contributes to the ignorance surrounding racial prejudice.

The most popular stereotype of black people in Egypt is represented by the infamous character Othman, which originated in the 1910s and was portrayed by Ali El-Kassar in blackface. This character is typically from Southern Egypt (Nubia), black, has a distinctive accent and is from a lower social class. Othman is characterized as a loyal, yet unintelligent, servant who is mocked for his accent, traditions and behavior. Othman's story frequently comically revolves around him being mistaken as an upper-class individual and how he is unable to fit in that society due to his culture and background (Tam 2). It is important to note that at the end of the film, Othman always ended up where he belonged, the bottom of the social ladder as he was not accepted as an Egyptian nor part of the upper-class (Tam 20). It is implied that when Al-Kassar portrayed Othman, he did so with an intention to shed light on the struggles faced by black people in Egypt, yet this was never understood by the 'unsavvy' audience (Tam 16). In the 21st century, the character of Othman still exists and is built on in order to confine black people into a certain stereotype: shortsighted, poor, servant and naive (Shalaby).

Despite the minimal racial inclusivity in the Egyptian media, international platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, consider inclusivity and representation as their top priorities during their casting procedures. For centuries Egyptian films depicted black people as "meek, resourceless people, with little intelligence, little talent, little agency" who are cast as servants in subordinate roles (Fahim). Those characters were referred to using derogatory words and their main role was to "cheer on the lighter-skinned protagonists" (Fahim). Similarly, prior to the civil rights movement, the appearance of black people in American films was limited to a range of inferior roles such as servants for white households or rustic sidekicks to white performers who are "lazy, dim-witted or fiercely loyal black slaves" (Garett 2). However, the American film industry has evolved to grant black people opportunities of fame and success such as Lupita Nyong'o, Will Smith and Morgan Freeman. The presence of such influential and audible figures has promoted and financed the BLM movement in the U.S. further empowering it. In comparison, Egyptian films continue to confine the role of black individuals as the buffoon and inferior character. The popularity of Netflix and other streaming services have indirectly assumed the role of normalizing the co-existence of equal black individuals which, in a way, acts as a substitute to the extensive deficiency in black public figures in Egypt. Yet the omission of black audible public figures still represents a massive impediment when it comes to achieving racial equality in Egypt (Al-Khamissi). Hence, black public figures play an essential role in educating the public about issues such as BLM and racial injustice faced by Africans in Egypt. White supremacy is not confined to film representation, white advertising is also a common phenomenon witnessed on Egyptian roads and television, by which white models are glorified in order to appeal to Egyptian beauty standards (Khairat). It is essential for these models to have western features such as straight hair, white skin and colored eyes because they have become equivalent to beauty (Shalaby). The importance of achieving such beauty standards have escalated to the extent that chlorine baths have gained popularity in 2018 in Egypt as a method of achieving fairer skin (Khairat). Correspondingly, black models are excluded from billboard and television advertisements because they have become equivalent to ugliness and undesirable (Shalaby). In spite of the power possessed by the media, allowing it to fuel and ignite revolutions through rapidly and internationally

spreading awareness, the Egyptian media has failed in positively contributing towards racial justice as it promotes anti-blackness.

Conclusion

Spreading like wildfire worldwide, the BLM movement is a vocal and determined cause altering black lives, yet it has not been capable of earning the Egyptian media's compassion and spotlight. Through a comparison of the struggle for racial justice in the U.S. and Egypt (or lack thereof), it is evident that the absence of black audible voices, media censorship and lack of social awareness cause racism to vastly persist in Egypt. This is visible through the lives of African refugees who are denied their right to school enrollment and working in the formal economy which limits their ability to endure the challenges posed by racial injustice. Through analyzing the behavior of Egyptians towards black people it is apparent that African refugees and Nubians are discriminated against due to their skin color, race (physical characteristics such as bone structure and hair) and ethnicity (cultural characteristics such as nationality, language and traditions). However, Egyptians with darker complexions are also discriminated against solely due to skin color. This indicates that the main issue lies in the notion that dark is inferior, dirty and ugly, whilst white is superior, clean and beautiful. Such perceptions may have originally stemmed from colonization which confined the elite positions to white people whilst black people were confined to being slaves or servants. Accordingly, Egyptians disassociate themselves from Africans due to the fact that they themselves come in a range of hues, instead they find it easier to associate with Arabs due to similarities in culture, language and religion, in addition to the positive connotations of being labeled as Arab. Racial injustice is further amplified due to the censorship, negligence and discrimination of the media which has been normalized. The Egyptian media has disappointingly continued to portray black individuals as inferior to other races in an attempt to dehumanize them. This is visible in the entertainment industry which continues to use blackface in order to mock Africans and Nubians for their accent, clothing and skin color. By confining black people to the role of the inferior servant in films and society, it is difficult for black people to break that barrier and become audible voices in Egypt. Thus, social awareness in Egypt remains insufficient for the advocacy for black lives due to the absence of black public figures. The aforementioned shortcomings give a better understanding behind the visible absence of the BLM movement in Egypt, and in order to break the vicious cycle of oppression in Egypt, it is imperative to set forth plans to resolve such issues. In retrospect, the 1960s American Civil Rights and 2020 international BLM movements were prosperous because of the widespread sharing of educational resources. Furthermore, as a result of the illiteracy in Egypt, the effects of racism and the hardships faced by black African refugees remain unknown to Egyptians. Accordingly, through integrating these issues in the Egyptian curriculum, hopefully, future generations grow up to be concerned about racial injustice in Egypt and progress in raising awareness. In addition, it is up to the new generations to educate themselves in order to break the cycle and take a step towards lessening the violence and oppression against dark-skinned individuals. This includes raising awareness through writing research papers, blogs and social media posts that shed light on the brutal life that black people are subject to in Egypt.

Figures



Figure 1 - Youm7 xenophobic and racist front-page headline in 2014 (Frenkle).

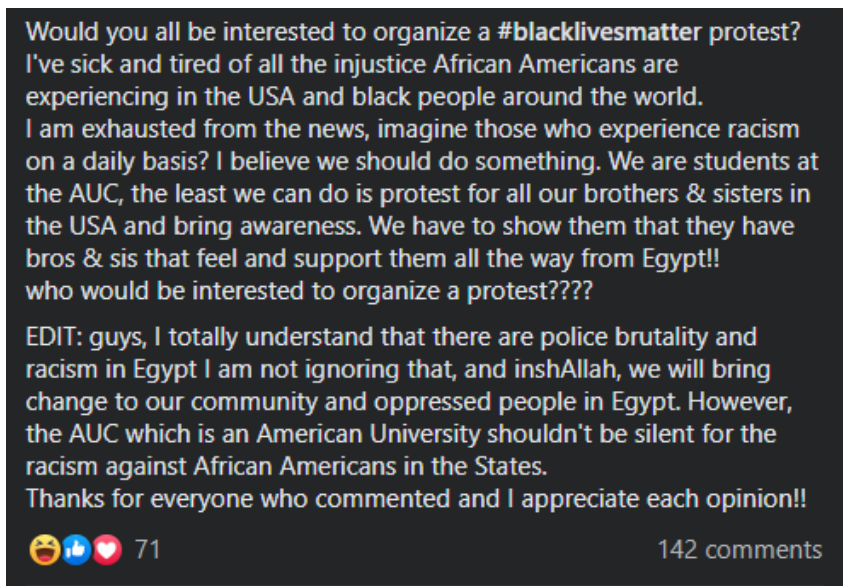


Figure 2 - Facebook post calling for action in support of the BLM movement.



Figure 3 - Facebook comments reacting to the BLM movement in Egypt.

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