

The Palestinian Struggle is a Black Struggle

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Global Research, June 17, 2013

[Electronic Intifada](#) 11 June 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Image: Who are the Palestinians' natural allies? ([Ryan Rodrick Beiler](#))

One of the pillars of [my trip to Gaza](#) with the [Palestine Literature Festival](#) turned out to be an ongoing discussion regarding the essential blackness of the Palestinian struggle and the need to form greater ties with our “natural allies” from [Africa](#) and South America in particular.

At one event, a man in the audience questioned the usefulness of seeking alliances or help from Africa, where, he said, people are “hungry and poor and in need of help themselves.”

I pointed out that the image he holds of African peoples was planted in his mind by those who also plant the same image of us around the world. We, too, are viewed as helpless, hungry and needy. We, too, are seen as less human somehow, as savages, terrorists. The various layers and tempers of our and their intellectual, cultural, social and historical lives are ignored, or worse, intentionally obscured. Instead, the challenges of our societies are highlighted as all-encompassing truths.

But a better answer came from Ayman, a gentle soul who is trying to start up a film program in Gaza to help children cope with the violent realities of their lives. He said, simply, “So what? What does hunger and poverty have to do with dignity, anyway?”

Sameeha, a brilliant Palestinian writer in Gaza, noted that such reductive stereotypes are precisely the things that hinder badly-needed alliances among oppressed peoples. She, along with Rana, the indefatigable, ever-smiling and warm organizer of PalFest in Gaza, also pointed out that too often, when we speak of engaging “the world,” what we mean is Europe and the US, because someone convinced us somewhere along the line that these were the only places that mattered. That somehow our freedom can only come from the same nations that facilitated and cheered on the destruction of our society.

That, of course, is far from the truth. But understanding this requires that we reorient the Palestinian struggle to align with indigenous struggles — struggles of the marginalized and voiceless — which I consider to be spiritually and politically black because there is no equivalent to the savagery inflicted on the black body over centuries by white supremacy.

To me, blackness is what has been and is the recipient of colonialism and supremacy, with all that this entails in clashing forces of internalization of inferiority, resistance, black power and black empowerment.

Natural allies

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon describes the narcissism of inferiority that results from white colonization and enslavement of blacks. He said: “Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.” This single sentence describes the Anglocentric nature of Palestinian discourse with “the world.”

The conversation we have with Europe and white America is one in which we are always trying to prove our humanity. One in which we beg for acceptance and solidarity, and one from which we accept the various sympathies of a white man’s burden as if it were true solidarity, or something of a slice of bread that comes with an admonition that we have not behaved well.

This is not to say that true solidarity has not come from white individuals. I would not deny the love and sacrifices of men and women like [Rachel Corrie](#), [Tom Hurndall](#), [Vittorio Arrigoni](#) and many more. I do not deny the kind of solidarity that transcends ethnicity. But there is an undeniable difference in the way peoples of different ethnicities relate to us.

With Africans, including American descendants of those who were enslaved, there is no need to preface our words. There is never a sense that we need to prove our worth or the righteousness of our struggle for liberation. This is what I mean by “natural allies.” They are people who know, viscerally, what it means to be regarded as vermin by most of the world. Those who know what it is to be the “wretched of the earth.”

There are still some Jews who remember that, perhaps. They too are our natural allies. But to continue to knock on European and white American doors, including Israeli doors, begging, “Please help me, please look at me, I am human as you,” is not helpful. It is not helpful to continue to accept conditional handouts that are turning our once proud people into a nation of beggars, willing to dance for butter. It is humiliating, weakening and, more importantly, unnecessary.

That any Palestinian should entertain the notion of “negotiations” with Israel for the basic dignity of freedom and home is a screaming example of the narcissism of learned inferiority. This is the essential blackness of our fight. In this way, our struggle for liberation is spiritually and politically black in nature.

One of the features of this negative narcissism is the aspiration to all that the oppressor entails, while simultaneously hating him. Fanon describes this aspiration to whiteness more eloquently than I ever could. In the Palestinian case, I will add that there is another layer to our condition, which can be described as the narcissism of victimhood.

I remember the first time I heard [Edward Said](#) speak in person. It was at an [Al-Awda](#) Right to Return rally, I think the first one we held, in 2000. He said that “we [Palestinians] should remember the solidarity shown to us here and everywhere.”

I think of those words often because I don’t think we do enough to honor the spirit of what he said. We don’t recognize the origin of the solidarity shown to us. We are so immersed in our own pain and suffering — however understandably so — that we regard our victimhood to the exclusion of other suffering, much as (although not quite with the same worship) our oppressors have done.

Black solidarity with Palestine

The fact is that there is a tremendous amount of unsolicited solidarity coming from peoples who are themselves victims of colonization, exploitation, rapacious capitalism and institutional racism.

A few years ago, I had the privilege of being invited to the Federación Democrática Internacional de Mujeres (Women's International Democratic Federation) in Caracas, [Venezuela](#). This was a gathering of women from all over Latin America, from [Mexico](#) to Chile and [Argentina](#) and everywhere in between. It was a forum to address the ills facing their societies: sexism, capitalism, ageism, homophobia, racism, land theft, exploitation, environmental destruction, indigenous rights, patriarchy, classism and so on.

They invited only two delegations outside of Latin America. One was a delegation of Palestinian women from Palestine and the other was a delegation of North American women, mostly women of color, including myself, a Palestinian.

Two weeks ago, the Organization of Women Writers of Africa held their a conference in Ghana. With all the ills that Africa — this continent that still reels from the legacies of centuries of white supremacy, exploitation, enslavement and so much more — faces, the conference still thought it important to feature discussions of Palestine.

In South Africa, at Time of the Writer, a literature festival sponsored by the University of [Kwazulu-Natal](#), the only invited non-African writer was Palestinian. It was a profound expression of solidarity with Palestine, born of an inherent comprehension that we and they are of the same fabric. The same pain and the same struggle.

Our most vocal and vociferous champions have been Africans and African Americans, from [Desmond Tutu](#) to [Angela Davis](#), [Alice Walker](#) and Cynthia McKinney. No one would blame Tutu if he focused his fight for justice solely on the economic apartheid that still festers in his country. No one could blame Davis or Walker if they spent their energies combating the great social and economic injustices that are the enduring and bitter legacy of centuries of enslavement in the US.

I could fill pages with examples of solidarity coming to us from communities and individuals who could so easily ignore us and immerse themselves in their own difficult struggles. Rarely will any of these examples be from our Arab brethren, particularly those in oil-rich nations, who have within their power the ability to affect real and significant change.

I know that we, too, do emerge from the yoke of Israeli oppression and ethnic cleansing to show solidarity, whether with tsunami victims, the Rohingyas in Burma, or exploited factory workers in Bangladesh. But I think we can and should do more to give solidarity where it is needed, even if we have nothing to offer but heartfelt words written and broadcast from the ghettos of Bantustans and refugee camps. Because such is an essential beauty of being human.

Because there is a kind of liberation that can only come from being a part of the liberation of others. And because fostering reciprocal human solidarity, is how we break an oppressors imposed isolation, such as the [siege of Gaza](#).

Because the United States and the European Union are not our friends. They have never

been our friends.

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