Black-Palestinian Solidarity: Towards an Intersectionality of Struggles

26 July 2015 Commentary Irene Nassar

Introduction

In October of 2015, more than 60 African American and Palestinian intellectuals and activists launched the "Black Palestinians Solidarity" statement of solidarity with exactly respective struggles. Declaring it a video "when I see them, I see me", the Black Palestinian Solidarity Statement was born in the context of the July August 2014 Israeli war on Gaza and the murder of Eric Garner in New York City in July the 14th 2014 and of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August the 9th 2014, two of the killings largely credited for launching the Black Lives Matter movement. The simultaneity of both events sparked a number of statements of solidarity from both Palestinians and African Americans to one another. We saw this when Palestinians from the Black Bank tweeted their war photos to solidarity with Ferguson and when the Hashtag #Ferguson#Palestine emerged, when Black artists, activists, scholars, students and organizations signed the 100% Black Palestinian statement of solidarity with Palestine, and when Palestinians tweeted solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and commitment to the liberation of Palestine's land and people". In other words, the Black Lives Matter movement launched, or rather relaunched, a discussion of the potentials of solidarity between Black and Palestinian struggles. In order to understand the politics of Black-Palestinian Solidarity, it is important to uncover the conditions that have allowed such solidarity to take place in the first place.

The aim of this piece, therefore, is twofold: to trace the historical context of both struggles and expose the classic components of their respective struggles in order to conclude on their relation within a politics of transnational solidarity framework today.

Tracing Geographies of Liberation in a Historical Context

Paul Gilroy once suggested that a consideration of Black American identity can be sound back to what he called the "Black Atlantic" which he defined as "a specifically modern cultural and political formation that was influenced by the experience and inheritance of the African slave trade and the plantation systems in the Americas, and which transcended the nation state and ethnicity" (Gilroy, 2010). The Black Atlantic concludes, he argues, when "[w]ays of life and modes of expressive and intellectual perspective" (Bernal, 2005). This already gives us one window into the theoretical foundation for a Black-Palestinian joint struggle for liberation and emancipation.

This transnationalism is present in both oppressive and, consequently, resistant forms. The politics of oppression take a transnational form through the framework, and under the logic, of international neoliberal capitalism as corporations and governments work hand in hand to subtract subaltern populations. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have described in their Empire, the ruling elites of the Western Bloc, "our governments (Bush, Blair, Berlusconi, Aznar, and Howard) and their counterparts in the world market and international institutions", referring to the post-9/11 exchange between the Israeli and American governments, "[a]ll of them are operating from Israel's military policy system, which controls Palestinians through paramilitary and counterinsurgency tactics" (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Transnationalism in the mobilization of oppression has given birth to the internationalization of methods of resistance and complicating the transnationalism of the Black Atlantic. In the globalization of the Palestinian struggle as a struggle against the forces of Western settler colonialism, the Israeli-American Empire exists, the fact that Zionism could be academically and intellectually analyzed from a set of perspectives that "mediate schools to broker over the resemblance between the case of Israel and Palestine with that of Black people in the United States" (Bernal, 2005). Indeed, the Black Panthers of the Black Bank, Black Lives Matter, or Black Lives Matter Palestine, or Black Palestine, or Black Lives Matter Palestine