

Palestine: The Challenges of Aid and Solidarity in the Context of Occupation

Summary: This essay is based on my reflections from a visit to Palestine in May 2012. An individual or an institution from outside can express solidarity, but can never liberate a people from their situation. Only the people going through an existential ordeal or suffering can do so. All liberation is self-liberation. This paper raises two significant strategic questions. History offers examples of oppressed nations who have liberated themselves from structural violence through non-violent means. Is a non-violent “third Intifada” in Palestine possible? In this context is there a role that outside aid can play? Aid, at its most voluble expression – as in “development aid” for example – is enslaving, demeaning and dehumanising. What, then, of “solidarity aid”?

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Introduction to the complex matter of aid and solidarity

An outsider – an individual or a government or an institution - has no right, in the name of “solidarity”, to interfere in the internal political divisions that is quite normal in a situation (such as in Palestine for example). These internal divisions may be resolved only by the people themselves. Once again, the outsider may offer helpful suggestions, but may never take sides. The divisions are “family quarrels” and family quarrels can sometimes be violent. Outsiders, especially with “big money”, may have an interest in stirring up family quarrels, to gain by dividing the family. Such “aid” is divisive, and self-serving.

Above all, finally, the first obligation of a person or an institution from the outside is to try and understand the “situation” in some detail and depth, and, if possible, with a spirit of empathy for the people caught up, or trapped, in that situation. That is a basic condition for an act of “solidarity”.

I take this opportunity to apologise for putting many words under asterisks. These words in the “occupation” context do not make ordinary sense because they are euphemisms to obscure a different reality. For example, “occupation” is really colonisation; and “settlers” are really colonisers. The “government” of the Palestine Authority is really no government: there is no “state” called Palestine of which it is a “government”; and “elections” are not what we understand as democratic elections; and so on. Then there are some words such as “event” and “solidarity” that have specific meaning in the essay, and these are explained in a glossary.

Visiting the Israeli colony of Palestine

I had heard about travel difficulties to Palestine and within Palestine, as an occupied territory. But it was following my visit that I now better understand that Palestine in fact is a *de facto* “colony” of Israel. Among other colonial apparatus, such as the use of Israeli currency – the shekel - in Palestine (which inhibits Palestine to have its own monetary or fiscal policy), one has to get an entry visa from an Israeli embassy to get into Palestine. In my case, however, the Israeli authorities were courteous, both when I got my visa in London, and when I arrived at the airport at Tel Aviv. There is a beguiling veneer of “normalcy” about certain matters relating to Israel-Palestine situation which can confuse especially an uninitiated visitor from outside. My host from a German Foundation received me and whisked me through myriad checkpoints to Ramallah. He has a German identity; I, a semi-diplomatic Ugandan identity. So in the Israeli Manichean diplomatic world, we belonged to the “normal” half of humanity. The “other half” has more difficult time navigating the complex world of Israeli security and apartheid-like racial classification of visitors. This other half includes the vast majority of Palestinians and indeed some Jews too. There are, for example, certain kinds of American Jews that cannot get visas to Israel or to Palestine.

But the artificial veneer of “normalcy” vanishes very quickly. Only the most ardent visitor determined to see the “positive” in the colony (like Barrack Obama, for example) will miss the palpable hoax that is Palestine. May be I wasn’t “positive” enough. But it is difficult to be positive about an apartheid state. In spite of myself, what shook me was the indescribably horrible existential plight of the ordinary Palestinians. One has to see with one’s eyes and hear with one’s ears to believe the horrendous, macabre, reality that is Palestine. Palestine in many ways is in a worse geo-demographic-racial miasma than South Africa during its years of apartheid. (I was a frequent traveler to South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s when I used to live in Zimbabwe). In some ways the comparison between Israel-Palestine and South Africa is odious. South Africa is a large country with an overwhelming majority of the indigenous people; during the apartheid era, the whites had no choice but to relate to the “blacks” -- as suppliers of labour or as consumers, for example. In Palestine, Israel has managed to import labour from Europe (especially Eastern Europe, Russia and South –East Asia), and has managed to get rid of large numbers of the autochthonous Palestinian people. What has taken place (indeed, a process that is continuing unabated) is *ethnic cleansing*. No amount of official denying or euphemism can obscure this reality. There are other differences between Israel and apartheid South Africa to which I shall come later.

This is one side of the horrid reality of Israel-Palestine. The other side of the coin is more encouraging. One does not have to be a hopeless romantic to witness and get inspired by the Palestinian peoples’ collective spirit of defiance and resistance. One does not have to look far or

deep to discover this. During my visit, I met and talked with many individuals and groups. One of these was a group of young men and women, who had just come after a protest march in support of two young Palestinians detained (forever) under the draconian and inhuman “Administrative detention (which is part of military law) . They had been on hunger strike , by then, over 70 days, together with 1400 more who had been fasting for varying number of days. This group of youngsters “did their own thing” – they met after work, collected money from their own pockets, refused to accept any kind of “aid” from outside, studied the situation they and their compatriots were in, and undertook acts of support for the prisoners in a non-violent and disciplined manner. Another group I met comprised of “left” intellectuals – some of whom I had “met” through their writings. The depth of their understanding and knowledge helped me to understand how difficult it is to “strategise” about the liberation of Palestine, even for them, let alone somebody (like me) coming from the outside. A third group was a large group who had come to hear my “lecture” in at the Orthodox Club Ramallah. It turned out the other way round; it was the audience that – coming from varied backgrounds – gave the “lectures” providing me empirical evidence and insights into the real hardships that the people of occupied Palestine were facing.

A fourth group I met was at a seminar organised at the Center for Development Studies, Birzeit University. There were about twenty people from the academia present. What impressed me was the consensus that the Palestine Authority (PA) was trapped in a difficult situation, and did not represent the will of the people, even though it is the people who had “elected” them to power. Among the participants was an elderly woman who impressed upon us that time had come for a “third intifada” – a “*long continuous intifada until liberation*”, she said. The other groups and individuals were from the “NGO world”. Palestine must be the most “ngoised” country in the world, with literally hundreds of them engaged in “welfare” or “solidarity” works with the Palestinians. The difficult question, as always, was whether it was “right” for them to take “aid” from “donor” agencies from outside to finance their activities in Palestine without getting trapped into the inevitable “conditionalities” of aid. Then there were a number of individuals I met, one on one. Many of them gave me valuable insights. The most significant, for me, was a veteran communist, now in his late seventies, who has “seen it all” and whose family have suffered the trauma (in his case) of over 50 years of “intifada”. He gave me an account of the two historical intifadas (he was in the forefront of the first people-driven intifada, and opposed to the second “militarised” intifada). His parting gift to me was a bottle of olive oil from olives that he harvested from his miniscule farm/garden and cold pressed in the nearby village.

What impressed me, also, whilst moving through Ramallah, East Jerusalem and Jericho, was that the Palestinians were going about their business as if nothing was happening. However, underneath the surface calm I could sense the feeling of frustration – even seething anger – leveled at the Palestinian Authority (PA). It was a government they had voted in power; but it was hopelessly ineffective in addressing the basic problems of the people (such as access to water, and the right to visit families and relatives across the hundreds of Israeli barriers and check-points they had to cross). And it was “spinelessness” when it came to “negotiating” with Israel or the “Quartet” of “mediators” that was led by the United States.

So my first task was to try and understand the character of the Palestine Authority and the nature of the “negotiations” in order for me to come to grips with the difficult issue of “solidarity” in the context of occupation.

What is the Palestine Authority?

As a matter of fact, the PA is a pseudo-government, not a “real” government. There is no “state” of Palestine of which it is a “government”. However, it is not “spineless”. Once the “pseudo-ness” of this “government” is exposed, it turns out that the PA, in fact, does have a spine; indeed, I discovered, it also has a brain (not meant in a derisory sense) which is a “product” of Israel and the United States. It is true that from time to time the PA speaks up against Israeli occupation and against continued “settlements”, but this is the minimum it needs to do in order to maintain the myth of an “independent entity” that can “negotiate” with Israel. It is a myth carefully nurtured by successive Israeli, American and European governments, and the mainstream Western media. When “President” Abbas sits on the chair next to President Obama in Washington DC, he appears to represent a sovereign independent state; but there is no such reality - Obama might as well be talking to his hands. This is not meant as a gesture of disrespect for Abu Mazen or Salam Fayyad or other people in the PA. It is an institutional reality and a personal tragedy.

Two things struck me as significant about the PA. One is its “aid dependence” and how this has corroded its capacity for “independent” thinking. And the second is the “class character” of the PA – itself partly a product of “aid dependence”.

Let us look closely at one event. In March 2012, the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad appealed to the US government to release the \$88.6 million in development funds that the U.S. lawmakers had blocked. "This is very important in order to help us deal with the economic crisis," Fayyad told reporters in Ramallah. "The entire sum must be sent in order to begin allocating spending for the year 2011 and this is important in order to support the Palestinian Authority's budget," Fayyad said. The historical context to this is that in August 2011, the US lawmakers had put on hold \$147 million in U.S. assistance because they objected to a Palestinian push for recognition at the United Nations, arguing that Palestinian statehood should be achieved through “negotiations” with Israel. Palestine was on the verge of being recognized as a state by the General Assembly of the UN, with the usual dissenters -- the US, Europe and possibly Japan. That would have been a nightmare scenario for them and for their NATO ally in the region, Israel. Palestinians’ statehood would have opened the door to the Palestine Authority to exercise some of its statehood functions, such as for example, arraigning Israel before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on charges of culpable genocide. (see glossary). This, of course, would have exposed not only Israel but also the NATO countries – equally culpable of, yes, genocide. This the US could not, would not, allow. In the meantime, seven Latin American countries had formally recognized Palestine as an independent state, but the Asian and African countries were persuaded by the United States not to emulate their Latin “third world” detractors. Obama pledged to veto any Palestinian statehood bid, and argued in the General Assembly that “only direct peace negotiations”, not a UN vote, would allow the Palestinians to achieve the benefits of statehood. And so it used its AID WEAPON to stop Abbas in his tracks on the UN front. No more was heard about the UN vote for Palestinian statehood. This, one must understand, is the background to the appeal of “Prime Minister” Salam Fayyad to the US government to release the \$88.6 million in development funds that the US lawmakers had blocked.

Aid has also created “class” divisions amongst the Palestinians – at its broadest level between the haves and the have-nots. The bulk of the population in Ramallah, for example, consists of

refugees from the 1948 *Nakbah* (many still in UNRWA camps, after nearly 60 years), and erstwhile peasant farmers from villages from which they have been pushed out by the Israeli colonisers in more recent years and months. They eke out a living under extremely hard conditions. The “haves” consist of rich (indeed, some fabulously rich) Palestinians from the Diaspora who have splashed their wealth around the “bubble city” of Ramallah; the political and bureaucratic elite that are either in the seat of PA “government” or working for UNRWA; and the “ngoised civil society” buttressed by aid largesse from hundreds of “donors” mainly from the West.

What is the character of “peace negotiations”?

The objective role of “peace negotiations” is to take matters outside the hands of the people and put these in the hands of the malleable PA.

I admit this is a rather laconic, perhaps even sardonic, assessment of the peace process; nonetheless, it is generally valid, as the following brief story of the two intifadas (1987 to 1993; and then 2000 to 2008) demonstrates. I recount this from hindsight, but the present often gives a better insight to the past than when one is too close to the time of the events. Additionally, I bring the perspective of an outsider, one sympathetic to the cause of the people of Palestine for liberation from a colonial existence.

On the eve of the 63rd commemoration of the *Nakbah* - the dispossession and uprooting of Palestinians that accompanied the creation of Israel in 1948 - al-Jazeera released some 1,600 documents related to the so-called peace process, covering more than 10 years (from 1999 to 2010) of talks between Israel and the PLO. The papers showed the utter futility of the so-called “peace process” based on the assumption that the Palestinians could negotiate as “equals” with Israel.

That is the verdict, in sum, of the “official” negotiations. But of course the people are different; they are not deceived by officialdom. In December 1987 the people revolted in a mass action of resistance against the occupation. This - the First Intifada - began in the Jabalia refugee camp and quickly spread throughout the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.¹

The “First Intifada” (FI) was a spectacular act of peoples’ resistance against the occupation. From hindsight some Palestinians have - understandably - romanticised it. There were, to be sure, instances of stone-throwing by youths against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and towards its end – some time in 1993 – executions of alleged Israeli collaborators. Also, in those nearly five years, Israeli forces killed an estimated 1,100 Palestinians, and the latter killed 164 Israelis. But it was not the violence that defined the essential character of the First Intifada. Its main feature was the largely non-violent actions by the masses, such as general strikes, boycotts of Israeli products, refusal to pay taxes, wall graffiti, barricades, ‘days of rage’, ‘days of mourning’, and commemorating the *Nakbah*. Later the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) joined the intifada, but it had no control over it because it was not their initiative or their “event” (see

¹ Intifada is not a new experience in the Middle East. For example, in an intifada called the “March Intifada”, the people in Bahrain had revolted against the British occupation in 1965. In Palestine itself the people had organised an intifada against the British from 1936 to 1939 in protest against its support for the creation of an Israeli state in Palestine.

Glossary). The PA did not exist then. Above all, the FI exposed the fraudulent character of the so-called “peace process”. The PLO’s “negotiations” with Israel had not brought any relief to Palestinian suffering. In fact, in 1982, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the PLO had been forced to relocate its offices to Tunis. So when the people took up resistance in the First Intifada, the PLO leadership was in Tunis.

The FI showed that Israel’s “iron fist” could be defeated. The “international community” (a euphemism for US-led community of nations) was focused on the Iran-Iraq war, and had no time to listen to the Palestinian people. The FI brought the Palestine issue out of the closet. It ended, once and for all, the “Jordan solution” that Israel had been pursuing until then.² But above all, it demonstrated the power of self-reliance and the power of non-violent resistance, as opposed to the previous armed actions (1949, 1967) using weapons of war from (the otherwise utterly unreliable) neighbouring Arab states.

And, what is now clear from hindsight is that the First Intifada alarmed the United States and the European Union. A “people’s war” is not what they wanted to see at their doorstep. It was far better to put in place a “government” of Palestine which they could control. So the “international community” organised a “peace process”, first in Madrid in 1991 and then in Oslo in 1993. These were critical; they totally transformed the nature of the struggle in Palestine – from peoples, non-violent struggle to a futile “peace process” interspersed with violent military and “terrorist” confrontations on both sides, fuelled by generous military aid to both sides (see below). The impact of the two conferences (and probably also the intent) was to disempower the people. Ironically, it was the First Intifada that had paved the way for the return of the PLO from its exile in Tunis back to the Gaza Strip. And it was the Oslo Accord that led to the creation of the Palestine Authority (PA) as the “government” of Palestine (see above about its pseudo-character) with whom Israel could now “negotiate” under the “neutral mediation” of, for example, the US President, Bill Clinton.

The September 1993 Oslo Peace Accord was a brilliant coup by the Empire. Oslo was not about establishing a Palestinian economy independent of Israel, or about the promotion of democracy. It contained no prohibition on the expansion of Israeli “settlements” (colonisation) in West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in contravention of international law. It did not provide for the right of Palestinian refugees to return, and it did not establish Jerusalem as the capital city for the Palestinians. Why did Arafat sign the Accord, then? From hindsight it is clear that he was allured by the prospect of returning to Palestine (from Tunis), and allowed to bring in 7,000 members of the Palestine Liberation Army from their bases in Jordan Yemen and the Sudan. Also, the Oslo Accord outflanked PLO’s rival in Gaza – Hamas – which at the time was encouraged by Israel as an Islamic counter to the “secularists and communists” of the PLO.

Oslo set in motion the “peace process” treadmill, creating the illusion in the mind of the PLO leadership that something would come out of it. Nothing did. Later, President Bill Clinton was to blame the PLO leadership for the failure of the Camp David “negotiations” in July 2000. And yet nothing was done to check the illegal encroachments on the lands of Palestine by Israeli “settlers” (colonisers). This, then, set the context for the Second Intifada (SI), also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

² Israel had sought to throw out all Palestinians from its territories into Jordan, as part of its earlier model of a “two state” solution.

The SI was triggered by the visit on September 28, 2000 of Ariel Sharon, a Likud party candidate for Israeli Prime Minister, to the Al-Aqsa Mosque accompanied by over 1,000 security guards. Sharon was probably the shrewdest leader of Israel – Machiavellian to the core -- probably now matched by Netanyahu. The stated purpose for his visit was to assert the right of all Israelis to the Mosque. The Palestinians, some ten days earlier, had just observed their annual memorial day for the Sabra and Shatila massacre, which the Kahan Commission had blamed on Sharon, then Defense Minister. Palestinians saw Sharon's visit to the Mosque as a deliberate provocation; critics claim that Sharon had planned it as a shrewd strategic move against his political rivals in Israel as well as to put Arafat in place. He had anticipated that the visit would trigger violence, and he was prepared to militarise the conflict.

From the very beginning, the Second Intifada was markedly different from the First one. On the very day of Sharon's visit demonstrations erupted all over the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli police responded with live fire and rubber-coated steel bullets. In the first five days, at least 47 Palestinians were killed, and 1,885 wounded. After that, for the next nearly eight years (from September 2000 to January, 2008), it was an asymmetrical war between Israel and the Palestinians. On 2001 May 18, Israel for the first time since 1967 used warplanes to attack not only military targets but also civilians, including children, inside Palestine. In January, 2002 January, Israeli naval commandos captured a freighter carrying weapons from Iran. In 2004 Hamas launched Qassam rockets and mortar shells from Gaza provoking Israel to search and destroy the tunnels through which weapons (as well as other supplies) were smuggled into Gaza. On 11 November 2004, Yasser Arafat died of natural causes in Paris, but not before appointing, under US pressure, the moderate (no asterisks needed here) Mahmoud Abbas as Prime Minister. In January, 2005 Abbas was "elected" President of the PA on a platform of peaceful negotiations with Israel. Soon afterwards at Sharm el-Sheikh Summit with Egypt and Jordan, Sharon and Abbas shook hands and declared mutual truce. The truce was rejected by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The rest of the story is recent history. During 2007-08, the Gaza-Israel conflict intensified, ending in the "Gaza War". On December 27, 2008 Israel launched a blitzkrieg-like military assault codenamed Operation Cast Lead targeting the members and infrastructure of Hamas in response to the numerous rocket attacks upon Israel from the Gaza Strip. The operation has been termed the Gaza massacre by Hamas leaders and much of the media in the Arab World. On Jan 17, 2008, Israel declared unilateral ceasefire, followed by Hamas on condition that Israel withdrew from Gaza and opened border crossings.

Summing up the experience of the last sixty years of struggle

To sum up the experience of the last sixty years of Palestinian struggles, four things stand out clear from hindsight.

One is that Israel is winning the war of ethnic cleansing. And there is not the slightest hint that the so-called "international community" that had so much to say about Srebrenica and Kosovo and Rwanda, and about human rights and humanitarianism, even remotely consider that the Palestinian ethnic cleansing is a matter of concern to them. This, by the way, includes "humanitarian" countries such as Norway, the Netherland and Denmark – all members of the military juggernaut, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – as well as, of course, the USA and the United Kingdom.

The second is that the “peace process” is a hoax. It is, essentially, aimed (and indeed carefully engineered) to dispossess the people of Palestine not only of their lands but also of their right to self-determination. In this “peace” process, it is war, or the military, that plays the most critical role. It is an asymmetric war. Israel uses “high technology” -- for example, Merkava heavy tanks and APCs; F-16 fighter jets, drone aircraft; and helicopter gunships that engage in “target killing” of Palestinian militants and civilians, just like the US does in the war theatre of Afghanistan. The Palestinians, on the other hand, use the “poor man’s weapons” – home made Qassam rockets, landmines, and small weapons imported from many other sources. (Israel singles out Iran for its own reasons). Many weapons come to Palestine legally, because they are used by the Palestinian “security forces”. Many small weapons are sold by the Israeli mafia as well.

The third is the role that “aid” plays in this extremely violent and in human terms extremely costly war and “peace” games. Israel currently receives \$3 billion in annual military aid from the United States, plus an unknown amount of economic assistance from the US (official aid and private) for which it does not have to account. The Palestinian Authority receives \$100 million annually in military aid from the United States, and about \$2 billion in economic aid -- including approximately \$300 million from the US; \$526 million from Arab League; \$651 million from the European Union; and about \$238 million from the World Bank – provided, of course, the PA “behaves” in line with the “peace process” as laid out by the “international community”.

One component of this “aid” is donor aid to the NGO or civil society “partners” in Palestine. Its objective role is to create the illusion that “the people” are participating in the “peace-building” process.

And, finally, the record of the last sixty years makes it clear that in this asymmetric power game, the best strategy for the people of Palestine is to re-engage in the non-violent struggle of resistance and non-cooperation for which the First Intifada has given valuable insights, tactics, and method of survival whilst also struggling for liberation from what is undeniably a struggle from colonial occupation. Acts of solidarity from outside – such as the BDS (Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions) movement – may help, but if not carefully conceptualised and worked out it could have a negative effect on the people’s efforts towards self-liberation.

And it is to this subject of self-liberation and solidarity support from outside to which I now turn.

Have the past struggles of the people against colonialism and fascism to teach anything?

As I stated earlier, my first obligation as a solidarity worker from outside was to try and comprehend the “situation” in its depth and complexity. I have to the best of my ability tried to understand the “situation” based on my research, readings, a visit (albeit too short), and, most importantly, discussions with people who know, people who were and are in the firing line. I may have, to change the metaphor, wetted my feet on the shores of the Mediterranean, but there is a whole sea to cross. And so to the inevitable, unavoidable, question: now what?

Since the concept of “a long continuous intifada until liberation” was uttered in that seminar in Birzeit University on 10 May 2012 by the elderly person (an educationalist) my mind has not stopped working on its potential and challenges. There must be some reason why this third intifada has not begun already; its time had come, she had said. Perhaps something is probably

on the drawing board, something to which an outsider like me cannot, and should not, be privy. But that does not prevent a solidarity worker's mind to be seized by the excitement of the concept.

During moments of silence and reflection, my mind travelled into the past in difference climes and times to look for parallels. Are there not lessons to learn from those past struggles?

I journeyed to the "Paris Commune" (March to May 1871); to Gandhi with his Satyagraha movement in South Africa in the first decade of the last century and in the 1930s and 40s in India; to the Spanish civil war and civil resistance against the fascists in Catalonia (1936-37); to the people's grassroots resistance in the villages of Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) to support a struggle that later evolved into a full scale guerrilla war (1960s and 70s); to the Sierra Maestra in Cuba and Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement in the years preceding the Cuban revolution of 1959; to the Sharpeville massacre (21 March 1960) triggered by a dare-devil march of the youth against the racist troops of *apartheid* South Africa; our own struggles in Uganda in the 1970s during the fascist regime of Idi Amin; and so on.

The two Intifadas: what lessons can they provide for the third intifada?

So much has been written on all the above listed "wars" (violent and non-violent) of national resistance, and yet, unless it is in Arabic, so little (it seems to me) on the First Intifada – a non-violent peoples' resistance that had lasted for not one month, not one year, but for nearly five years. On various occasions the methods of the resistance struggles were recounted to me, by young and old, sometimes with a whiff of romantic nostalgia – the people refusing to buy anything from the shops of the colonisers; the children getting together on the streets to work out their next graffiti; the women getting together to cook and to wash the tired feet of their children with hot water and local herbs; the burrowing deep in the history and culture of the Palestinians looking for "local remedies" for illnesses and pains; and so on. All those experiences might be recorded by those who went through them - those still alive, and those who know about it. And they might be discussed – for lessons learnt and mistakes made – in research groups and in "study" circles.

Some false or questionable options

As an outsider I was sometimes astonished to hear about what I thought were patently false options or questionable "practical" solutions to how the suffering of the people might be alleviated through making the system work either more "efficiently" or in a more just manner. I will not give full account of these, but simply refer to some of the arguments for further reflection.

One of these was called "Entitlements". Here the basic argument was that since Israel is occupying Palestine, it has an "obligation" to provide for the welfare and sustenance of the people, and following from this that the people are "entitled" to "aid" or "budget support" from Israel. In a sense, this is true as a logical construct. But it is no different from, to take a historical metaphor, that the slave is "entitled" to his ration of food because the master owes it to him. A variant of the above argument is that much of the aid goes into the pockets of the rich and the elite, and that there is therefore a need for a more equitable distribution of aid. Again, it seems a

good logical, and ethical, argument. But, again, it is an argument (to continue with the slave metaphor) between slaves on who should have what out of the food laid out by the master.

A second argument relates to tax collection, and the use of tax revenue. One is that the tax base of the PA should be “improved”. The customs revenue from imported goods, for example, is collected by Israel and a portion transferred to the PA. It is argued that the PA should negotiate for a better deal. Also, many companies are not effectively taxed in the Palestine. According to a 2010 report by AMAN, a Palestinian coalition for transparency and accountability, of the 146 foreign companies and aid organisations registered, only 40% operate in Palestine. This is partly because Arafat exempted from registration all USAID institutions, branches, bodies and companies, and the argument is that the PA should revoke the exemptions. An extension of this argument is that the PA should not only demand accountability from foreign NGOs (now numbering some 1,500), but also tax their operations. Again, there is little to quarrel about any of these what appear on the surface to be eminently sensible suggestions. What is difficult to know is how and why the occupying powers (Israel, the US and Europe) should oblige the PA from changing a system that is part of their system of control and management of the POT (Palestine Occupied Territories) and the PA “government”.

A more amenable argument relates to restoring the practice during the heydays of the PLO when 5% of the salaries of those working in the Gulf were deducted as “tax” for the PLO. This certainly is an idea that can be explored further with the proviso that these monies might be better used by a liberation movement than be put into the coffers of the PA budget.

Linked to the argument about better tax collection is the one about a better or more “efficient” use of the tax revenue. One example that came up in the discussion was that of helping the PA should provide more resources to agricultural development and devise a better industrial strategy – including industrial zoning – and thus make a more efficient use of aid money and tax revenue. This, too, is a good management suggestion, but somewhat abstract given the fact that the occupying power(s) may have no interest in developing Palestine’s agriculture or industry.

A third argument is about the austerity measures and structural adjustment programmes that the PA is imposing on the people as part of the donor or World Bank conditionalities. It is argued that the PA should challenge and resist such measures. Again, this is eminently a good idea, but perhaps the people of Palestine can learn a thing or two from the recent experience of the people of Greece faced with the challenge of working out a democratic way out of the clutches of finance capital, especially the dominant German capital in this case. In the case of Palestine, it is a colony of Israel’s and the challenges are far greater than for example those facing the people in Greece.

A fourth argument (and this is the last one I mention, for there are more) is about "good aid" and "bad aid". The argument is that "aid" itself is not the problem; the problem is that some aid is good and others bad, some donors are good and others are bad, and the question is: how does one know what is good aid is and what is bad, who are the good donors and who bad? What are the criteria? One NGO has grappled with this question, and has drawn up an "Aid Report Card on good and bad aid in context of Palestine." For example, aid that requires an "anti-terrorism certification", as is the case with USAID, is bad aid and should be rejected; and aid that is framed with the explicit goal of challenging Israeli occupation, or compliance with international law is good aid, and might be accepted. In my own book "Ending Aid Dependence" I had made a

classification of aid into five categories, distinguished by their colours. One of them - "purple" aid - I regarded as "solidarity aid" and therefore acceptable. These included aid that helps, for example: to build resistance against domination; to develop knowledge centres; raise awareness; bring issues to the public domain; and provide alternative strategies.

Since writing that book I have been engaged in monitoring the OECD's "Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness", and I saw at firsthand how "aid" has been used in the context of development in Rwanda. I also attended the December 2011 Busan Conference on Aid Effectiveness, and saw for myself how aid is used, inescapably, to push the agenda of the providers of aid.³ Based on these I have come to the conclusion that while some of the examples of "good aid" in my *Ending Aid Dependence*, and similar examples in the "Aid Report Card on good and bad aid in context of Palestine" are eminently "sensible" criteria, "good aid" is really an abstraction; that aid which takes the form of "money" (even a grant) creates a debt, an obligation; and that it is corrosive of the spirit of solidarity. That does not mean that money cannot enter into a relationship of "solidarity"; it is that it is then better not to call it "aid", for words do matter.

Conclusion: The point about all the above arguments – from entitlements to making efficient tax collection; from making good use of state revenue and foreign aid, to the criteria for differentiating between good and bad aid (and good and bad donors) - is that whilst these arguments make good sense in the abstract, or simply on logical or ethical grounds, they raise more questions than answers in the concrete case of colonial occupation, as in Palestine. Overall, it is better to be cautious about allowing these matters distract one from the more challenging task of strategising for a liberation struggle that puts an end to colonial occupation.

Elements of a Third Intifada - a "long continuous intifada until liberation"

Learning from previous experiences of peoples' struggles against colonialism and fascism (such as in South Africa, Zimbabwe, China, India, Cuba, Chile, Uganda, etc.) and building on Palestine's own home grown intifadas, a few ideas might be floated for further reflection.

The first priority, of course, as mentioned earlier, is to facilitate an open, organised debate about the history of the first two intifadas, especially the first one. These are people's histories and memories that contain a rich harvest of socio-cultural heritage as well as practical tactics of struggles on a day to day basis.

The second priority is organisation. Golda Meir - an earlier generation Prime Minister of Israel - used to say that she was not worried about the Palestinians until the day comes when they learn how to stand in a queue. Well, that day may have come. There are, of course, differences among Palestine's political leadership – as indeed in all situations of struggle. It is nothing unusual. Some of these differences are fostered from outside, some are products of internal rivalry and

³ See my previous writings on the subject. 2008. *Ending Aid Dependence*, Fahamu Books; 2012. *Demystifying Aid*. Pambazuka Press. (Also available in Arabic); 2012. "It is official: Busan heralds the dismantling of the aid industry", Pambazuka News, No 563, December 2012. <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/78651>

power and ideological struggles. The first big rift came during the 1990s when Hamas came on the scene, initially encouraged by Israel and the Islamist movements. So the first obvious task is to bring all the various factions and tendencies within Fatah and Hamas together to share a common responsibility to liberate Palestine out of colonial occupation. There are indeed matters of ideology and of sharing power in a democratic dispensation, but these are the very issues that need to be frontally faced and addressed. This is what Gandhi was able to achieve in India, Mao in China, Castro in Cuba, and Mandela in South Africa.

Of course, it is not necessary to wait for a Gandhi, or a Mao, or a Castro or a Mandela or another Arafat to emerge. Leadership does not have to originate from the top. In fact, it is better when leadership comes from below and accountable to the people actually engaged in the day to day struggles. This is what happened during the First Intifada. In time the people will produce their own leader or leaders.

What does one do with the “peace negotiations”? My candid view is – nothing. The peace process can resume when significant gains are made by the people on the ground. And that could take years. During the intifadas, when the grass-rooted leadership surrendered their autonomy and self-reliance to the leadership that returned from Tunis and allowed “aid” money from the West and the neighbouring Arab countries to flow into Palestine, it is then that the autonomy and self-reliance of the intifadists was lost. They lost control over the movement turning it into a sham “peace process” of “negotiations” between two unequal parties.

A third urgent task is to absorb the lessons of the so-called “Arab Spring” that started from Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and that has now engulfed the entire region from Yemen to Syria and beyond to Iran and Turkey. There is no space to write about this here. It is a huge subject and requires careful, dispassionate, study and understanding in order both to learn from the positive aspects of these new currents in the Middle East, and to avoid getting entangled in their more destructive and negative tendencies.

The above tasks – open, organised debate about the experience of the intifadas, building grassroots leadership that can unite various factions and tendencies in the liberation movement, and learning from the “Arab Awakening” – pose formidable challenges. But they are not insurmountable. These educational, strategic and organisational issues have to be addressed in an organic and not mechanical manner. For example, the organisational issues cannot be resolved through some mechanical “electoral” façade. Also, these are not “sequential” issues. In other words, there is no inexorable law that says that all the history of the previous intifada must be written up first, that the lessons of the “Arab Spring” learnt and absorbed, and the question of leadership be addressed, before embarking on the other equally urgent tasks that constitute parts of the ongoing struggles. Some of these issues are listed below for urgent attention even as some of the larger strategic and leadership questions take time to ripen to a mature resolution of their internal contradictions.

The first among these, of course, is water. The Israeli authorities (and that includes the PA) have foreclosed access to water. Water is a basic right that the authorities have no right to deny to the people. Water is the essence of life itself. It is needed not only for drinking, cooking, washing and ablution but also, if there is a little more, for local gardening to grow vegetables, fruits and flowers. So water, in my view, is the first intifada objective of struggle in this phase. The intifadists might consider mobilizing the engineering skills at for example Birzeit University to

help identify sources of water in people's backyards or in open spaces that can be claimed by families or groups of families, followed by a structured system of allocation of this water, not only to urban but also to the rural areas (where the need might be even greater). This would strengthen solidarity among the people. Water is not only of use value, but also a catalyst to unify the struggles of the people at the grassroots and functional levels.

Anyway, digging is only "allowed" in the cities of the West Bank. Bigger style digging would otherwise lead to the destruction of the structures by Israel or decreasing of Israel's allocation of water it stole from the West Bank to Palestinians on a basis of Israel's own arbitrary calculations. (In Zimbabwe, when I wanted a water borehole I engaged a traditional water expert. He used two sticks and went around my garden. Whenever there was water a few meters below the ground, the sticks moved. I thought it was some kind of magic. But this is how people identify water sources in the villages of Zimbabwe. And sure enough, when the water engineers later came to measure the aquifers they did find water in these locations. One site was then chosen to build my water borehole. The engineers used heavy drilling equipment to reach the water). People in Gaza, where the ground is soft, dig tunnels. In the West Bank the ground is hard and rocky. I am not technically qualified to assess this, but my hunch is that technically this should not be an insurmountable problem for people in Ramallah to dig wells to reach underground water. The people may profit from some technical help and equipment from outside solidarity groups. Where possible, however, it may be possible to maximise the use of engaged human labour. In my time in Zimbabwe when I was working in the villages between the years 1983 and 1995 I was involved in the building of some 60 water wells and shallow dams. The villages used human labour to make shallow wells to reach the water. This may pose a problem in Palestine, but it is precisely these kinds of problems that bind people together. In other words, this is something that is doable, achievable, and its success can be both material (access to water) inspirational.

A second priority would be to boycott the use of shekels as money, not as a one stroke, overnight action, but in stages. One method that has been tried successfully in some communities in the United States and other parts of the world is that of issuing "*labour vouchers*". How does this work? Let us begin with, for example, the making of water wells. Young persons or community women providing labour for the making of the wells would, in return for their labour, receive "labour vouchers" showing the number of hours worked. These vouchers would constitute "money", as substitutes for shekels. These would be exchangeable for another labour activity (for example, taking an old person for a walk for an hour) or service (such as looking after a baby for a couple of hours), or even buying commodities (five hours of digging could be equivalent, for example, to a kilogram of olives, or two chicken). Again, this is not something that needs a genius to work out. Again, Birzeit University or even secondary schools should have enough talent to work out "the labour equivalents" for all kinds of labour works and services. Over time, a "system" or "institution" can be created to make the "labour vouchers" look a bit more "polished" with a seal of a recognised body (say the "money committee" at Birzeit University). Of course, the Palestinian Authority, under pressure from the Israeli authorities, would attempt to crack down on such an experiment at creating "alternative money", but they would fail. How can they stop a couple of families or communities offering one another "free" labour of their grown up children or adults in return for labour or services rendered to one another? It is a system of "mutual self-help" and the authorities can have no say in the matter. Once some experience is gained from this exercise, the communities can set up an "alternative banking system", where the "labour vouchers" are "deposited" and an account opened for the

“depositors”. Some local banking experts can work out regulatory banking principles for their application to “community banking” in and around Ramallah and in other areas of Palestine.

Then there are a number of “self-help” projects that can be set up by families or a group of young people that might be called “manufacturing”. These could include, for example, a “manufactory” for cold pressing olives; a “clothes making factory” for making shawls and sweaters; a “laundromat” for laundering clothes paid for out of “labour vouchers”; etc. There are unlimited possibilities. On first sight these “*intifada activities*” might look impossible, but they are not, as the experience of the first intifada can testify. Of course, there is the well known story of Mahatma Gandhi who, during the Indian resistance against British occupation in the 1930s, suggested people should boycott salt (which was a state monopoly) as direct action campaign of tax resistance. People thought he was “mad”. How can one deny oneself salt? But Gandhi said it could be done. So he set out from his home town to the sea to “make salt”. It took him 23 days to walk the 390 kilometers, and thousands of people joined him on the way, and they made salt. Over 80,000 Satyagrahists were jailed as a result of the salt boycott. Later, Gandhi used the same method of self-reliance to boycott imported cloth and clothing. He and his comrades built a model of “spinning wheel” (called “charkha”) with which to spin raw cotton and make yarn, and then use the yarn to make cloth (called “Khadi”). Satyagrahists boycotted imported clothes and began wearing only clothes made out of “Khadi”.

This example of Gandhi’s successful experiments are given not to suggest that the same might be done in the occupied Palestine, because the Palestinians have experience of something like this already during the first intifada. There are other examples from other parts of the world. In New Zealand a similar but at a very different level experiment was tried out by the Maoris. During colonisation of New Zealand the indigenous people were denied the use of their language. Children of Maori peasants were severely punished (including chopping their fingers) by the authorities if they talked in their mother tongue. Over time, the Maori language died. In 1975 I was a guest of the Maoris and stayed with them in Auckland for a week in a “*marae*” (communal housing with communal cooking, working and sleeping facilities). My Maori hosts told me how they resurrected their language. Ten years earlier, young women from schools and homesteads went around villages identifying old Maoris who had a smattering of memory of their mother tongue. Slowly, step by painful step, the young people built an impressive vocabulary, and restored a forgotten grammar and syntax, and recreated the Maori language. Maori is now recognized as an official language (besides English) in the schools and also in the New Zealand Parliament.

These examples of the “salt march” and re-creating the Maori language are given in order to show that where there is a will, and determination, that which appears “impossible” at first thought might not be that impossible. The equivalents of India’s “Satyagrahists” are Palestine’s “Intifadists”. The Intifadas have among them the young and old, men and women, girls and boys. There are among them “natural” leaders. They have ideas, and the spirit. They can launch an intifada against paying taxes, for example, or boycotting the use of shekels, or building water boreholes, or creating small “manufacturing” using local materials and labour. All these can be done, even in the open “prison” of the Gaza Strip, or in the “bubble city” of Ramallah.

As I said earlier, acts of solidarity from outside - such as the BDS (Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions) movement - may help, but if not carefully conceptualised and worked out it could have a negative effect on the people's efforts towards self-liberation. I have monitored the

struggles in South Africa for some 30 years, and I am of the view that the effect of the “boycott” movement by solidarity activists, though helpful, has been wildly exaggerated. South Africa was liberated by the spirit and struggles of the people of South Africa, starting with the Sharpeville marches of the young led by Steve Biko. Between the internal and the external, the internal is primary, the external is the secondary.

One area that I would like to return to is the issue of language. Language matters; words matter.

NATO- Israeli doublespeak

Doublespeak is a clever use of language and concepts. Its purpose is to disguise or distort reality making it less unpleasant or more palatable. Language is a trap; it shapes thinking. You think in words and concepts.

The question is: where do these words and concepts come from? This is a big question that challenges epistemologists. But in the Palestinian context, it is not such a big philosophical mystery. The words and concepts come from the Empire (the US Empire and Israel), developed and enriched by the media and an “intellectual” community dominated by western “scholarship”, and passed on. The Palestinian intellectuals and media absorb the euphemisms for reality, for otherwise they would not be able to communicate. Words take on a life of their own, apart from reality. The reality is obfuscated. Even the most “liberal” or “revolutionary” gets caught up in vocabulary of the oppressor, the coloniser, the imperialist. It is surreal, macabre. Deliberate euphemisms are part of the arsenal of the enemy to confuse thinking, and therefore also to confuse strategies.

Here is a sample of some doublespeak vocabulary I found in Palestine, used not just by Israel and the Palestine Authority, but also (not surprisingly) by the ordinary people and the Palestinian intellectuals. The list can be extended.

Political and diplomatic euphemisms	Ontological reality
Palestine Authority (PA) or Palestine government	Colonial Authority (CA) or colonial government
President	Colonial Governor
Prime Minister	Colonial Chief
Settlement	colonisation
Settlers	colonisers
Entitlements	Slavery
Aid	Debt
Check-points	Dead Streets
Gulf (GCC) countries	Arab - NATO
Ramallah	Bubble city
Gaza Strip	Gaza concentration camp
Jerusalem	O Jerusalem!

By way of conclusion

My visit to the occupied (colonised) country of Palestine was an eye-opening event and an occasion for reflections. I was energised by the various people I met, and inspired by the concept of a Third Intifada - a "long continuous intifada until liberation" – a concept waiting to mature into a strategy and tactics for action. Above all, I repeat, it is important to refuse to think in the euphemistic language of the very people and forces that oppress the people. A new language and a new strategy for liberation go together. What looks impossible today is not so impossible. As an outsider working on a solidarity platform my first obligation was to try and understand the “situation” as best as I could, and then, offer ideas from other instances of peoples’ struggles in other times and other places, including my own experiences in Uganda. This is all I have attempted. I hope these reflections are useful.

GLOSSARY: (These still need to be defined)

Asymmetrical war
Colony, colonisation
Development aid
Entitlements
Ethnic cleansing
Event
Genocide
Intifada; intifadist(s)
Labour vouchers
Money; alternative money
Nakba
NATO- Israeli doublespeak
Palestine peace process
Sequential and parallel processes
Situation
Solidarity
State, regime, government, pseudo-government
Study; study circles

@ Yash Tandon, Oxford, 22 May, 2012