Anti-Colonial Resistance in South Africa and Israel/Palestine: Comparative Dimensions

Ran Greenstein
ran.greenstein@wits.ac.za
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Forty-five years ago, the Israeli radical left publication *Matzpen Marxist* (Marxist Compass) featured an article titled "Israel and South Africa: shared present, shared future". The article reviewed trade and military links between the regimes in the two countries, and discussed their structural similarities. It concluded by saying: "The last year [1976] saw a resurgence of national liberation struggles in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Palestine. Temporary retreats are possible, but the struggle will continue until complete liberation from colonialism and racism. An international plan calls for funding the repatriation of white Rhodesian settlers. Unlike them, most Israeli Jews have nowhere else to go. They should draw the necessary conclusions before it is too late".[1]

From today's perspective it is obvious that Israeli Jews drew precisely opposite conclusions to those intended by the author: instead of abolishing colonial rule over the Palestinian people they have entrenched control over the 1967 occupied territories and continued to deny the right of the 1948 refugees to return to their homes or receive compensation. At the same time, Palestinian citizens of Israel have experienced a more complex trajectory: their freedom to organize and demand rights through civil struggle and social mobility has increased, but so have legal-political exclusionary steps undertaken by the state, in the last two decades in particular. Such moves stand in contrast to developments in Zimbabwe and South Africa in the same period, which eventually led to independence from colonial rule and national liberation in 1980 and 1994 respectively – the outcome of sustained campaigns of political and military resistance.

The comparison of the Palestinian and southern African struggles undertaken in 1977 was triggered by the coincidence in time of two major manifestations of resistance in the previous months. Massive protests in Israel/Palestine on both sides of the Green Line (the pre-1967 border) against land confiscation and political oppression, centered around the Day of the Land in Israel, 30th March 1976, and the Soweto Uprising in South Africa, on 16th June of that year, which gave rise to a renewed wave of anti-apartheid protests in coming years.

It was not the first time, of course, that such a comparison was attempted but previously the focus was almost entirely on the mode of colonial domination, not resistance to it.

Starting in the 1960s, the invocation of apartheid South Africa in discussions of the Israel/Palestine question became more common. Perhaps fittingly, the first to raise that openly was 'the architect of apartheid', Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, who responded angrily to an unprecedented Israeli vote against South Africa in the United Nations General Assembly: "Israel is not consistent in this new anti-apartheid attitude. Otherwise they would have been prepared to be swamped and destroyed by the Arabs around them. But they took Israel from

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[1] Part 1 in *Matzpen Marxist* (February 1977), part 2 in *Matzpen Marxist* 93 (March 1977). The 20-years old author identified as R. Yarkoni ('R. Greenie').

the Arabs after the Arabs had lived there for a thousand years. In that I agree with them. Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid state".[2]

To be sure, Verwoerd meant the apartheid analogy as praise not condemnation. Others sought to position the Israeli regime in a less benevolent light of colonial oppression and apartheid rule, although displaying unique features. Using the same terminology as the South African Communist Party in its 1962 programme, *The Road to South African Freedom*, but without explicitly mentioning it, Meir Smorodinsky of Matzpen argued that Palestine experienced colonialism of a special type. Colonialism usually exploited the labour of the natives, he said, but Zionist settlement was different: "Its goal was the dispossession of the original residents in order to establish a Jewish state. The aim of normal colonialism was to exploit the riches of the country; the aim of Zionist colonialism was the country itself". Jewish immigrants who settled in Palestine saw it as their country and severed their links to their countries of origin. Their rights in the country could not be denied. The solution thus was "changing the Zionist nature of the State of Israel", making it the state of those who lived in it, not of world Jewry. This called for cooperation between Jewish and Arab forces, not an exclusive Arab struggle, as advocated by pan-Arab nationalist forces at the time.[3]

In a follow-up, Smorodinsky noted that the Zionist movement was different from all other colonial projects, including that in South Africa, as it sought to remove indigenous residents and build a state for immigrants. The resulting conflict was ***not*** national in essence, "not a struggle over territory with a mixed population" but a struggle between a colonial movement, which continued to displace the Arabs from an ever-growing part of Palestine, and the Arab national movement that aimed to establish control over all Arab-inhabited territories.[4]

Two other landmark studies of the mid-1960s focused on Israel and Zionism as colonial projects. Fayez Sayegh's *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* argued that Palestine was "a radical departure from the trend of contemporary world history", due to the "dispossession of the indigenous population, their expulsion from their own country, the implantation of an alien sovereignty on their soil, and the speedy importation of hordes of aliens to occupy the land thus emptied of its rightful inhabitants".[5] It was an anomaly: "Nowhere in Asia or Africa – not even in South Africa or Rhodesia – has European race-supremacism expressed itself in so passionate a zeal for thoroughgoing racial exclusiveness and for physical expulsion of 'native' populations across the frontiers of the settler-state, as it has in Palestine".

Along similar lines, French intellectual and activist Maxime Rodinson argued that Zionist settlement was the product of "a European ideological movement". It achieved its goal thanks to its sense of nationhood, its superiority in techniques of weaponry and organization, and its ability to mobilise public opinion in Europe and America on its behalf.[6] Rodinson pointed out that Israeli-Arab relations were less of "exploitation than of domination" without diminishing their colonial character or determining their future. He noted that there was no question of "chasing the whites out of South Africa because of their colonial origins. They are asked simply to coexist with the Blacks as equals". Whether settlers could retain their political autonomy in a postcolonial setting was not obvious: "Sometimes the native ethnic group can be brought by force to the point of recognizing this autonomy, which then becomes legal with

[2] *Rand Daily Mail*, 23rd November 1961.
[3] S. Meir, "Al-Ard and Us", *Matzpen*, 21, Aug.-Sept. 1964.
[4] S. Meir, "The Root of the Conflict: Zionism versus Arab Nationalism", *Matzpen*, 23, Nov.-Dec. 1964.
[5] Fayez Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (PLO Research Center, 1965), p. V.
[6] Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* (Monad Press, 1973 [French original in 1967]), p. 76.

the passage of time. But one can only claim to have left the colonial process behind when the native group, as a result of negotiated concessions, comes to accept this autonomy".[7]

Neither Sayegh nor Rodinson outlined a political strategy derived from their analysis. That task was undertaken by the Fatah movement, in a document written by Faruq al-Qaddumi just before the June 1967 war. It said that "the worst type of occupation" involved foreign forces bringing sections of their people "to take the place of native peoples" by "dispersing, exploiting, or exterminating" them. French rule in Algeria was an instance of that type, as were Rhodesia and South Africa, and also "the Zionist occupation of part of Palestine, the usurpation of that territory, and the expulsion of its inhabitants". In these cases "colonialism removes the social imprints of the oppressed people and splits it from its natural environment. It may also reduce it to an exploited class that works in the service of colonial interests", thus making the indigenous people "a single class of exploited toilers".

Palestine was distinct though, since colonialism there "took the form of expelling an entire people from its country, the occupation of its land, the shredding of its social being, and the imposition upon it of the punishment of genocide". Palestinians were replaced "by dispersed groups coming from a wide variety of societies and united by an interest in colonisation". Armed violence became "the inevitable singular method" in the liberation war, with the goal of eradicating the military forces of "the occupying Zionist state", destroying "the industrial, agricultural, and financial foundations of Zionist society", and terminating "the military, political, economic, financial, and intellectual institutions of the occupying Zionist state". Only popular war was capable of "liquidating the occupying Zionist state politically, socially, and intellectually".[8]

This analysis pointed out to a problem that theoretical definitions or political condemnations of colonialism could not solve. The majority of Palestinians were displaced in 1948 and were replaced by Jewish immigrants. Most of them remained beyond the boundaries of Israel, as Jews became the new majority in the country. Two strategic questions presented themselves:

- How could struggle unfold under conditions in which indigenous people (Palestinian Arabs) were excluded physically from the territory they sought to liberate?
- How would they deal with the settlers (Israeli Jews) who took their place and became the new majority?

The 1967 war and the fall of a large population under Israeli military occupation (including hundreds of thousands of the 1948 refugees) modified the terms of these questions, but they are still key to the Palestinian struggle. It remains the case that the majority of Palestinians, with the exception of the minority who became citizens of Israel, *operate politically outside the physical and institutional boundaries of the Israeli state*, even when they are living under a regime of Israeli domination, as is the case for residents of the 1967 occupied territories.

The anti-colonial struggle in South Africa, which unfolded at the same time, faced different conditions. Indigenous people were excluded legally and politically but were present socially and economically. In fact, the structure of South African capitalism hinged on their presence as suppliers of labour that historically served as the foundation of white prosperity in the

[7] *Ibid*, p. 90.
[8] Fatah, "The Liberation of Occupied Countries and the Method of Struggle Against Direct Colonialism", May 1967. http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/uploads/sources/588c768baf7ba.pdf
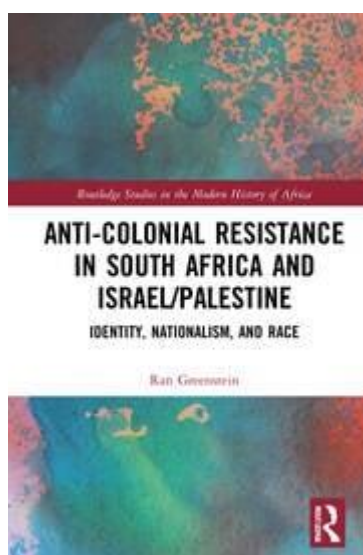
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country. Further, dependence on cheap labour meant that there was no need for large numbers of white settlers to occupy all positions in society. As a result, indigenous people remained a majority throughout the period.

How to deal with settlers (as part of the problem, potentially also part of the solution) was an important question, of course, but it rarely posed a serious challenge to a vision of the future in which indigenous people were the demographic as well as a moral and political majority. Redress was seen as reversing dispossession, changing ownership of land, redistributing resources, with no real need to move and remove white people. Playing an essential role within the core white-dominated social and economic structures of South Africa (fields, mines, industrial enterprises, services, households), black/indigenous people used their position as a leverage in order to undermine the system from within.

Whether that system was defined theoretically as *Colonialism of a Special Type*, to be countered by a broad front of different racial/national groups (as per the SACP/ANC), or as foreign *White Domination* to be defeated by Africans in a national liberation struggle (as per the PAC), or *Racial Capitalism* to be fought by all those excluded on racial grounds (as per the Black Consciousness Movement) – the focus remained on the oppressed black masses inside the country as the key force of resistance. Their leaderships may have been in exile for decades, but the bulk of their supporters and popular constituencies were located in townships and rural areas, and their communities became the main arena of struggle, where the anti-apartheid campaign was eventually won.

From the perspective of the 21st century, the question of resistance is particularly pertinent with the ongoing political stalemate in Israel/Palestine standing out against the transition to full democracy and formal equality of rights in South Africa. It is no wonder that the struggle against apartheid in South Africa has become a focus of interest, a historical analogy, a moral lesson, a strategy for change. In some respects, though, treating it as a model is motivated primarily by considerations of political utility, and that hampers the power of the comparison.

To make the most of it and draw useful lessons, we need to shift attention away from regimes and systems of domination towards liberation movements and modes of resistance. This is the focus of my book, *Anti-Colonial Resistance in South Africa and Israel/Palestine: Identity, Nationalism, and Race* (Routledge, 2022).

The book differs in perspective from most other comparative studies in three key respects: it focuses on resistance rather than domination; it looks at nationalist and left-wing movements as dynamic forces responding to social and historical challenges, rather than as offering a static set of legal and political principles; and, it examines South African developments in their own right rather than as a taken-for-granted benchmark against which the Palestinian struggle should be seen. In so doing, it presents resistance from the point of view of activists and intellectuals affiliated with anti-colonial movements, looking at the ways in which they theorized the conditions of struggle, identified allies and enemies, and defined strategies and solutions.

Two other deployments of the apartheid analogy have become prominent recently, though neither of them is central to the book, which discusses on-the-ground resistance movements over the course of the last century. The first focuses on legal analysis and the second on solidarity campaigns. The legal analysis received much attention in the last couple of years in particular, with the release of reports by human rights organisations operating in Israel/Palestine and globally.[9]

There is a large overlap between the reports, centred on the dual legal system that subjects Israeli citizens and Palestinian residents of the 1967 territories to different sets of laws and regulations, enforcement mechanisms, and civil and political rights. Israelis enjoy full access to the political system, have the right to vote to all levels of power, and are entitled to state services and legal protections. Palestinians in the territories are denied any say in the way they are governed by Israel, lack access to basic human and legal rights, and suffer from restrictions on their ability to move, work, trade, and study freely. They live under "an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime", which is the definition of apartheid in international law.[10]

There are disagreements in the reports over the boundaries in which the definition applies, whether only in the 1967 territories or the entire area under Israeli rule 'from the River to the Sea'; whether the definition applies to the State of Israel as a body or rather to its policies and practices; whether it is necessary to make comparisons to historical South African precedents in the analysis, and; whether and how international legal instruments can be called upon to intervene in the matter of Israeli domination over Palestinians. Two features are shared by all the reports: they agree that Apartheid is a relevant, indeed essential, concept for the analysis

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[9] Among them are *The Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid: Legal Opinion*, by Yesh Din, September 2020, https://www.yesh-din.org/en/the-occupation-of-the-west-bank-and-the-crime-of-apartheid-legal-opinion/; *A Regime of Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is Apartheid*, by B'Tselem, January 2021, https://www.btselem.org/publications/fulltext/202101_this_is_apartheid; *The Legal Architecture of Apartheid*, by al-Haq, April 2021, https://aardi.org/2021/04/02/the-legal-architecture-of-apartheid-by-dr-susan-powers-al-haq/; *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*, by Human Rights Watch, April 2021, https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed-israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution; *It is Apartheid: The reality of Israel's Colonial Occupation of Palestine*, by the PLO, Negotiations Affairs Department, June 2021, http://www.dci.plo.ps//files/It%20is%20Apartheid%20%20NAD-PLO.pdf; *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity*, by Amnesty International, February 2022, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/; *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967*, March 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-occupied-palestinian-territories

[10] https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/09/human-rights-watch-responds-reflections-apartheid-and-persecution-international-law

of Israeli rule, and they focus on legal analysis and policies, paying scant attention to social and historical aspects of the evolution of Israeli, Palestinian, and South African societies.

Notably absent in all of them is the historical dimension: the rise and demise of apartheid and racial domination broadly in South Africa were processes that unfolded over a long duration, which were not replicated elsewhere. Oppressive regimes of a similar nature could and did emerge in other places, but they grew out of different histories, which shaped their specific features, presented unique challenges, and opened up distinct opportunities for political transformation. The reports are rightly concerned with the *here and now* and have no need to delve into such matters. But, in order to make sense of the process that led us to where we are today, we need to take a brief detour of a more historical and theoretical nature.[11]

Over centuries, South Africa witnessed the operation of colonial forces (Dutch East India Company, the British Empire, Afrikaner and English settlers, missionaries, farming, mining, and industrial interests), which collaborated and competed over the control of indigenous groups. During a long period of expansion this pattern gave rise to a multi-layered system of domination, collaboration, and resistance. Numerous political entities (British colonies, Boer republics, African kingdoms, missionary territories) emerged as a result, displaying diverse social relations (slavery, indentured labour, communal production, land and labour tenancy, sharecropping, and wage labour). A central feature was common to all of them though: white supremacy was a means to ensure white prosperity, using black labour as its foundation.

A uniform mode of control had begun to crystallise by the end of the 19th century, aimed to guarantee the economic incorporation of indigenous people while keeping them politically excluded. Apartheid was a link in that historical chain, seeking to close existing loopholes tighten control, and entrench white domination.

Resistance too changed during that period, from early attempts to retain independence on disparate pre-colonial foundations, to a struggle for incorporation of elites at the national level, and later on the masses as well, on an equal basis, as discussed in chapter 3 of the book. These efforts were materially grounded in the massive presence and crucial role of indigenous people in the white-dominated economy, which provided them with an important strategic lever for change.

Since the 1930s, most black/indigenous political movements aimed to transform the state from within rather than form independent political structures on pre- or post-colonial foundations. Theirs was a struggle for incorporation and equal citizenship rather than for separation based on distinct national identities. Even with the ascendance of Africanist discourse it was frequently formulated in inclusive terms of continental identity, rather than exclusionary terms of race, ethnicity, language, and tribe.

By the 1980s, with the rise of internal resistance – new trade unions, Black Consciousness, the Soweto uprising, as discussed in chapter 6 of the book – white elites had come to realise that apartheid was becoming counter-productive in guaranteeing growth and prosperity. It was too costly and cumbersome, and irrational from an economic point of view: it hampered the formation of an internal market and prevented a shift to a technology-oriented growth strategy. It caused social dislocation, widespread discontent, and community-based protest.

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[11] This brief historical overview is based mostly on Ran Greenstein, *Genealogies of Conflict: Class, Identity, and State in Palestine/Israel and South Africa to 1948* (Wesleyan University Press, 1995).

All that, combined with growing burden on the resources and capacities of the apartheid state and international pressure, including economic sanctions, provided the final push towards a negotiated settlement, which took the form of a unified legal-political framework within which numerous social struggles continue to unfold to this day.

Israel/Palestine has experienced a different trajectory, producing two distinct ethno-national groups competing over territory and resources, without entering into relations of inter-dependence as was the case in South Africa. The formation of Israel in 1948 deepened the divide between the groups but also gave rise to Palestinian citizens as an intermediate community. A major reason for the historical divergence from South Africa is that indigenous Arabs and settler Jews had started to consolidate their group identities – linked to broader ethno-national collectives – *before their initial encounter*, whereas white settlers and indigenous people in South Africa formed their collective identities *in the course of the colonial encounter* itself.

As a result, the Zionist settlement project faced indigenous Arabs as a solid obstacle to be removed from the scene in order to clear the way for Jewish immigration into the country. White settlers in South Africa, in contrast, focused on control of resources and populations (both land and labour) as they expanded into the interior, to enhance their prosperity. Political domination was primarily a means to an economic end in South Africa and an end in itself in Israel/Palestine.

With that as a background, the founding act of the State of Israel in 1948 was linked to the Nakba – the ethnic cleansing of the majority of the Arab population living in the areas allocated to the new state, and the marginalization of the minority who stayed put. This has had contradictory effects. On the one hand, the massive demographic shift allowed the state to adopt formal democratic norms and incorporate Palestinian citizens in a qualified manner, in turn giving Israel international legitimacy as an expression of the self-determination of the new Jewish majority. On the other hand, the same process gave rise to a permanent external challenge from Palestinians who were forcibly dispossessed in 1948, and found themselves outside of the state's boundaries, but did not abandon the quest to return, as discussed in chapters 7 and 8 of the book. Neither outcome had parallels in South Africa under apartheid.

With the 1967 occupation another component was added to the picture, moving it closer to South African apartheid: large number of indigenous Palestinian subjects were incorporated into the Israeli labour market but remained disenfranchised. The state was unwilling to extend to them the political and civil rights enjoyed by Palestinian citizens, and unable to impose on them a 1948-style ethnic cleansing. They became stuck in a limbo. It was this population that the Oslo process of the 1990s aimed to address, and for whose situation the apartheid definition is most clearly applicable. But, the international consensus about a solution to their plight is not incorporation on an equal basis, as was the case for South Africa, but separation and formation of their own state.

This is the case because decades-long resistance to Israeli rule has centred on the goal of political independence as part of the overall Palestinian national struggle, as discussed in chapter 8 of the book. The notion of equal rights for all, along the lines of 'one person, one vote', was never central to their quest for freedom, whether defined in social, political, or national terms. To an even greater extent this is true for the 1948 refugees, whose demand has been for return to their original homes and communities – whether they physically exist or not – inside the territory of pre-1967 Israel, rather than to achieve statehood outside of it.

Many residents of the West Bank and Gaza were employed in Israel for two decades after 1967, but the uprising (Intifada) of the late 1980s, followed by the 1990-91 Gulf war, resulted in drastic restrictions on movement and decline in levels of employment. In any event, the core industrial and technological sectors of the Israeli economy were never dependent on their labour, concentrated as it was in construction and agriculture. With the rise of globalised labour markets, they could be replaced by workers from south-east Asia, Turkey, Romania, and China. They never acquired the indispensable role of black labour in the South African economy, and it served no purpose from an Israeli perspective to incorporate them on a permanent basis.

Economic benefits could be derived from the 1967 occupation – land and water resources in particular, and the availability of captive markets for Israeli industries – but the exploitation of labour was not central to them. Rather, the primacy of political imperatives, linked to nationalist and religious ideologies, mandated the continued inclusion of occupied land and the exclusion of its people.

The system that came into being may be called Apartheid of a Special Type (AST) – a combination of democratic norms, in a qualified manner within the pre-1967 boundaries, military occupation in the 1967 territories, and exclusion of extra-territorial populations – the 1948 refugees. It is different from CST in South Africa, in which indigenous people and other marginalised groups were always the majority of the population although they were excluded politically. The Israel/Palestine system meets the definition of apartheid in international law but presents different challenges for the campaign against it than was the case for the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The most important of these is the challenge of effecting change from *within* when the bulk of the forces seeking such change are located *without*, both physically and conceptually.[12]

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS), launched by Palestinian civil society organisations in 2005, has sought to emulate the anti-apartheid movement of South Africa in calling on people and organisations "to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era". Pressure is to be put on states "to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel", until Israel recognises "the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination" and complies with international law by: "Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall", "Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality", and "Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194".[13]

The BDS call identifies the three key dimensions of the Palestinian condition and in that way provides a comprehensive picture of the situation, but it ignores the most important aspect of the anti-apartheid strategy in South Africa: the internal mass struggle to undermine and transform the political system from within. That struggle was the crucial component of the campaign, as discussed in chapter 6 of the book. To some extent it received a boost from other components, such as armed struggle and international solidarity, but these were secondary in nature. To elevate the solidarity campaign to the key position, perhaps even the

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[12] Further discussion in Ran Greenstein, "Colonialism, Apartheid and the Native Question: The Case of Israel/Palestine", in *Racism after Apartheid: Challenges for Marxism and Anti-Racism*, edited by Vishwas Satgar (Wits University Press, 2019), pp. 75-95
[13] https://bdsmovement.net/call

only one, in the struggle against Israeli apartheid, as is frequently done these days, is equivalent to putting the cart before the proverbial horses. Although the anti-apartheid solidarity campaign had started in the 1950s already, it only took off globally in the 1980s, *after the revival of the internal movement and under its impact*.

Of course, the BDS campaign aims to mobilise solidarity overseas rather than organise people for change actively from inside the country. Yet, many international activists regard it as the only voice of the Palestinian people. In fact, it is better seen as a conceptual framework for decentralised global action, with a platform formulated in broad terms in order to reflect the concerns of constituencies that are represented politically, on the ground, by forces such as Fatah, Hamas, and the Joint List, as discussed in chapter 8 of the book. It is not meant to replace these forces, each with the demonstrable support of hundreds of thousands of voters, and it usually keeps apart from internal political debates and contests, which proceed with little regard for it. With that said, its role in encouraging external solidarity campaigns deserves recognition.

In summary, a great historical arch may emerge into view. In South Africa, resistance started out from a meagre basis. Black South Africans were fragmented politically and incorporated socially in a subordinated position into a new state that was built on cooperation between two white settler groups. Settlers were united in seeking to streamline the mechanisms of domination over the indigenous population, backed by the power of the British Empire. A resistance movement fighting white supremacy had to be formed almost from scratch. Starting out by seeking equality for qualified elites, it gradually extended its mandate to include the broad masses, considered unqualified by Western standards, as discussed in chapter 3 of the book. The movement also radicalised its message, from 'equal rights to all civilised people' to 'equal rights for all'.

As it gained in confidence due to local mobilisation, inspired by continental and global developments, it moved from seeking inclusion into white-dominated structures to demanding an overhaul of the political and social edifice, on a non-racial basis as the Freedom Charter had it or on a Black/African-inflected basis as Africanism and Black Consciousness had it, as discussed in chapter 6 of the book. From asking for a qualified entrance into an already-occupied house it shifted to insisting on full rights of ownership, albeit not as sole proprietor. That remained its stance during the apartheid era. An inclusive national identity was created in a process that potentially was open to all citizens regardless of race and ethnicity. The discourse of struggle combined appeals to specific constituencies defined by identity, with universal messages appealing to notions of class, nation, democracy, and justice. This facilitated the move towards a negotiated solution and the political transition of the 1990s.

The Palestinian-Arab movement moved in a different direction. It started out with a demand for political power as the demographic majority and historical owner of the country, as discussed in chapter 5 of the book. It was willing to accommodate a Jewish minority but from a position of strength, as a good-will concession, without compromising on the exclusive Arab claim to the land. That stance was shattered with the Nakba of 1948. Once the national movement began to recover from the military defeat and dispersion of the people it continued to claim sole ownership of the country but, at the same time, began to shift its position regarding Jewish settlers, no longer a minority in the country. They were still regarded as outsiders who had acquired their title through the use of illegitimate force, but they needed to be accommodated in future arrangements – as a concession to reality, not as of right.

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The notion of a Secular Democratic Palestine in which all would live equally was a major conceptual breakthrough, but it was formulated largely within an Arab or Palestinian-Arab framework that Israeli Jews never regarded as genuinely inclusive, as discussed in chapter 8 of the book. Ethno-Nationalism in Israel/Palestine continues to play a divisive role with no overall common national identity ever emerging to encompass, even if potentially only, all groups. From the mid-1970s onwards, compromise has taken the form of separate sovereignties – for Palestinians, on an ever-shrinking territorial basis – rather than shared power within inclusive political structures.

The two resistance movements differed also in their deployment of theory. In both cases Communist Parties played an important role in developing analysis that drew on left-wing conceptualisations of race, class, and nationalism, formulated in the context of global colonial domination and anti-colonial resistance, as discussed in chapters 2, 4, and 6 of the book. But, in South Africa the Party was much more closely aligned with indigenous nationalism than in Israel/Palestine. And in fact, its key role in the struggle was a bone of contention within the liberation movement, never resolved satisfactorily. Whatever analysis the Party came up with – the Native Republic, Colonialism of a Special Type, the National Democratic Revolution – it always sought to link theory to practice, highlighting the relevance of the social theory to political organisation and strategies of grassroots mobilisation. When it identified the black working class, or white liberals, as distinct forces with a specific role in the struggle, it called for organising accordingly and dedicating energy and resources in that direction, with the Congress movement usually following suit, having accepted its theoretical guidance.

That was not the case in Israel/Palestine. Communist Parties were marginal in relation to the national movement as a whole, and theory in general was less important. The Palestinian movement frequently used concepts such as settler colonialism, racism, fascism, imperialism, and class terminology, in its analysis, but the links between these terms and political practices were not consistent, as discussed in chapters 5, 7, and 8 of the book.

To illustrate: if Zionism was a form of racism and racial discrimination, or of settler colonialism, what were the implications of such analysis for the struggle? Did it mean that the Palestinian movement was facing all Israeli Jews (the vast majority of whom self-define as Zionists) as an immovable object with no chance of making inroads among them, or were there opportunities for an alliance with sections of that population? If opportunities existed, how were those sections identified in line with the analysis? What resources and efforts – educational, linguistic, cultural, political – were necessary in order to make potential alliances into a reality rather than a mere slogan? How could the movement proceed to generate those resources accordingly (invest in learning Hebrew, make its messages culturally appropriate)? Of course, adopting a universalist language with potential to appeal to Israeli Jews would have come, at least to an extent, at the expense of the specific nationalist language essential for mobilising the movement's core constituency, so there were no easy choices there.

And, on a different note, if workers and peasants were the true revolutionary classes, from whose ranks militant activists would come, as the Popular and Democratic Fronts maintained as discussed in chapter 8, how was that to be reconciled with their focus on armed struggle, whose fighters did not engage in processes of production? How were the nationalist and class discourses compatible, given that they pushed towards different alliances with internal and external forces? These questions were infrequently asked, let alone answered, hampering thus the ability of the Palestinian movement to combine theory and practice as effectively as its South African equivalents did, the ANC/SACP alliance in particular.

On a more speculative basis, we may conclude that there is no clear relation between wealth of resources and success in struggle. The South African liberation movement was poorly resourced for much of its history, without strong allies locally and globally, fighting an uphill struggle against powerful opponents. It never enjoyed the kind of massive support given by the Arab and Islamic worlds to the Palestinian movement, though arguably such support was more a liability than an asset. This forced South African activists and intellectuals to develop creative political strategies and come up with innovative analyses, harnessing moral and spiritual energies, relying on mass mobilization, making the most of the movement's meagre assets, juggling core positions with flexible shifts demanded by changing circumstances. If there is a lesson that can be drawn from that example, perhaps, it is this: an essential pre-condition for success may be the unwelcome realisation – 'you are on your own!'

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