



*Evaluate Palestinian methods and possibilities for resistance to occupation. Civil resistance and the role of the public.*

**“Resistance, Mindsets and Transformation: The need to be proactive.”**

The most important point I want to emphasise is the power of our minds: that it is through mental images and focus that we create our future. The artist can only paint a masterpiece when she or he has imagined the painting first. The pianist needs to hear the music in his or her mind before they can perform brilliantly. It is only through imagining and focusing on what we would like for our future, and for our future identity, that we may eventually get there. Although the long occupation and the prolonged political stalemate have sapped much of our will for resistance, we can (and therefore we must) create in our minds the details of our future as we would like to live it. This means shifting away from the (generally negative) perceptions of the present and the past, to positive perceptions of the future. Given the enormous power of words to influence our perceptions, we need to introduce positive concepts to help us in this (such as human security) so that we can co-create a future based on positive relationships at all levels: neighbourhood, community, national and international.

This is an exploration – more a series of questions that have occurred to me as I reflect on how utterly stuck we seem to be at the moment. Questions around human security and active nonviolence, and what it is still within our power to do to influence the situation for the better. And in particular as to what we, the public can do, given that the public at the moment does not seem to have much visibility or audibility – that all action seems to be focused at the topmost pinnacles of power. What can we do given the stunning lack of empathy from the Israeli public over the war on Gaza, and when it seems that most Israelis are comfortable with the current situation because they do not have to see Palestinians and are in general completely unconcerned about the occupation (?) as long as it doesn't have any obvious effect on their daily lives.

What can we do about this?

**“We have to be the change we wish to see in the world.” said Gandhi famously. -**

I interpret this as meaning that we have therefore to be the leaders of change as opposed to being the victims of change.

Resistance begins in the mind. Just as does war – but the mind has the distinguishing feature that it can create goals and dreams and ends, in addition to beginnings. Minds can go as far as they like into the future – to beyond the mere end of occupation and the initial establishment of, for instance, an independent state, to imagining what that state would look like – at the daily human level (not just at the level of borders and military security) and what kind of relationships it would have with other states, especially with Israel, and how people's lives would in fact differ from their lives now.

For instance, we need solidarity – we are currently fragmented and behave according to the wishes of the occupiers – our thoughts, our dreams are limited by them – we hardly think beyond removing the road blocks or gaining freedom of movement.

But instead of focusing on the obstacles, we need to think instead of the change we would like to see – to create this in our minds. There is huge power in words - by introducing a concept we start to create change - eg we can introduce hope and faith in the future - we can start to mentally reject fragmentation (to look ahead at how we would like to be as Palestinians) and to enlarge our thoughts from “a Palestinian state or “a one state solution” to imagining how that state will look both internally and externally (? this conference is a wonderful start here). - we can start to change the discourse from one of past wrongs (whether intra Palestinian or other) to one of future potential and future positive interactions. We can start to focus on common goals in a way that could override competition.

We can also of course start in practice on some of the improvements we might hope to see with the end of the occupation - such as cleaning up our rubbish - working at the local and community level - this is also part of unity and part of the way to beat the mindset of just being fragmented victims of the occupation.

But the trouble with minds is that they tend to fall into habits, or mindsets, and that all too often it is our emotions that drive them, and in the case of a conflict especially, these are likely to be negative emotions. We all too easily get stuck in mindsets that then dominate our attitudes and our behaviour, and when they are negative, these reinforce the negative emotions leading to a vicious cycle of narrower mindsets, so that all people can think of is attacking or

fleeing.

Ahimsa, to Gandhi, was not mere physical non-violence, but its higher spiritual meaning, which recognizes that all negative action crops from the seed of a negative thought. Hence, the ahimsa he strove to practice was destruction of all uncharitable thought, even in connection with those whom one may consider one's enemies. The core principle, when one offers non-violent resistance, is to oppose the injustice, but without losing sight of the human being inside the aggressor or the opponent.

So what could be? should be? the role of the public and the public mind regarding resistance? which public are we talking about? Should it be just trying to figure out the best method of “resistance to occupation”? versus for instance violent, nonviolent – preferably of course the latter - or should it instead be working with the public on imagining a peaceful future and on ways to transform the current negative hostile mindsets and rhetoric that fuel the conflict? How can this be done? What about exploring the paths of transformation away from polarization and demonization (? Of course this can be in relation to internal Palestinian problems as much as in relation to the occupation) as a more efficient way to end the occupation? What about considering if there would be ways to figure out resistance NOW via looking at the desired relationship after say ten years or so??? Is it possible? Necessary even? to reframe and raise awareness among both populations and perhaps also including international public opinion of our inevitably intertwined futures and of our shared needs? To explore new ways of looking at the future?” Should we be looking also at ways to create empathy so that there can (despite all the odds against it at the moment) start to be a shared desire by both populations for a just and

sustainable peace?

**“But when your situation is hopeless, all you can do is turn the world upside down, transform it according to your wishes, and create it anew.”**

“And that is precisely what Princess Budur did.”<sup>1</sup> This story about the Princess Budur (from the 1001 nights) a pampered princess who during a long journey across the desert with her husband, woke up one morning to find that he had disappeared and that she was utterly without protection. Instead of just giving in to her apparently hopeless situation, she dressed in her husband's clothes and got into his carriage and had one of her slave girls pose as herself in her carriage and continued safely on her way – in spite of apparent helplessness she made the right and very daring) decisions – in spite of all the odds against her - later she even got to marry a king' daughter and became the ruler of a kingdom.

I came across this story in a memoir about growing up in a harem in Morocco in the 1940s – how the women who were completely confined behind walls almost all the time, used their imaginations and their dreams and their enactments of stories like that of Princess Babur to liberate themselves.

Is it possible to resist the occupation by making it undesirable or unnecessary for the Israelis as well as for the Palestinians? By taking away the driving forces of it that exist in the minds of the public? When the leaders are not moving, the onus moves to the public if they want a better life – there is a problem of people

drifting at present – of a need for civic engagement and co-creating a good future – therefore there is the need for a new look /new formation of concepts – new exploration of eg sharing/ relationship/ where is the long-term sustainability? What are the ways to meet the needs of the public?

Maybe human security has one of the answers - instead of looking at state needs – at national boundaries based on military security, one way to start is to look at individual needs for security.

The emotion of fear is one of the driving forces of this conflict - and fear makes sense in the context of conflict, so if we want to transform the situation, then we have to address this emotion and the hostile mindset it gives rise to.

In a healthy relationship, such as there should be between two independent and contiguous states, fear should not be a component; on the contrary, both will need to feel secure. The reframing of military security as “human security”, which focuses on individual needs and especially on the need (and right) for “freedom from fear” is one way to start a positive shift.

Human security also focuses on the right to dignity - one of the most painful aspects of the occupation is the constant humiliation - it insults as well as impedes and violates. Can we find a way to resist this by drawing attention to the desirability of reciprocal dignity? Humiliation can only breed violence and more humiliation. In any bearable future scenario there can be no place at all for humiliation. There is room for action here - especially of the mind, as humiliation only works on those who allow it. Dignity comes from inside, and one way to help promote the reciprocal dignity that is needed, is to develop internal dignity - even with the intent to humiliate - the silent dignity of those going through the road blocks.

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<sup>1</sup> Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood by Fatima Mernissi – Perseus Press 1994, p.134.

"Dignity is to have a dream, a strong one, which gives you a vision, a world where you have a place, where whatever it is you have to contribute makes a difference."<sup>2</sup>

This concept of human security can start to shift the mindsets so that people start to perceive security in a way that also shifts their awareness around the problems of fear and dignity.

Another approach is to address the emotion of fear directly - via a major nonviolence movement or via a high-level official endorsement of nonviolence in Palestine. There is a long tradition of Palestinian nonviolence, among all sectors of society, but this is all too often not recognised and instead Palestinians are subject to the cruel and unjust stereotyping of being inevitably associated with violence in the minds of the international and especially the Israeli public. (At MEND, we have been building up a campaign that is "Smarter Without Violence" to start breaking the stereotypical association of Palestinians with violence). We could go much further at the level of the role of the public. But we could also link the public with the governmental level on this and ask for Palestine to be the first country to set up a Ministry of Nonviolence - which would not just be an empty ministry but on the contrary, would establish a one or two year "National Nonviolence Youth Service" for all young Palestinians. This would train the young in conflict transformation and in leadership and self-esteem, and in solidarity- all vital components of nonviolence, so it would serve internal needs and would serve as a major vehicle to transform the hostile mindsets that associate Palestinians with violence.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.214

Human security as a new paradigm and a Ministry for Nonviolence are possible ways to encourage more positive emotions in this conflict. Rethinking and Reframing the future in terms of a relationship can further help transform the situation - from fear and hatred to interest and curiosity.

Transformation happens when a group of people begins to dance together. In a dance people are no longer stuck to their positions. They create synergy by moving their hands and feet in a certain rhythm that defines the theme of the dance. In a perfectly orchestrated dance, one person does not collide or compete with the other. They in fact create space and harmony for each other. Even when one or two people make mistakes, the dance still goes on. A dance transforms random movements into magic created in real space and real time.

To go back to Gandhi:

**"We have to be the change we wish to see in the world," he said, firmly believing that through satyagraha and ahimsa, nonviolence in word and action, one could achieve anything.**

We could add that one side changing creates change in the other. Liberation starts with images in our MINDS and we need to start with liberation from the lack of hope.

The role of the public is to start imagining, to start to resist the occupation in the mind - to be willing to look differently at the situation, including the internal Palestinian situation, and at the Israelis. We need to stop being passive victims in a conflict and become pro-active partners in thoughts, words

and deeds in a series of developing relationships.

Lucy Nusseibeh,

East Jerusalem, October 2009