Solidarity in an age of complicity

A book that refuses to wait

All the contradictions, confusion, and inconsistencies in Africa's complex relationship with Palestine surfaced at a gathering in Cape Town in May 2026 to launch *Rising for Palestine: Africans in Solidarity for Decolonisation & Liberation*. But this was not your typical book launch, according to BRUCE KADALIE, who was there. It was part a call to action, part a challenge to conventional academic scholarship, and part a celebration of the global solidarity that an event of this kind is a part of.

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There are book launches that function as polite literary salons, and then there are gatherings that feel like war councils. The launch of *Rising for Palestine: Africans in Solidarity for Decolonisation & Liberation* in Cape Town on 18 May 2026 was emphatically the latter. Co-hosted by the Institute for African Alternatives, Surplus Radical Bookshop, and the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, the event was billed as the book's first launch on African soil. Professor Usuf Chikte of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign introduced the co-editors − Suraya Dadoo and Raouf Farrah − for what unfolded as a combustible mixture of intellectual rigour, political urgency, and the kind of raw emotion that only emerges when literature is not merely describing history but trying to interrupt it.

But if the audience expected a sombre, grief-stricken affair, they were quickly disabused. What emerged over the course of the evening was a bracing, sometimes uncomfortable conversation about complicity, contradiction, and the unfinished business of decolonisation − not as metaphor but as material practice.

The key interventions by Dadoo and Farrah and in the audience Q&A discussion revealed both the strengths and the fault lines of contemporary Palestine solidarity in Africa.

Setting the scene: a night of competing calendars

The evening opened with what seemed to be an apology for logistical friction. Professor Chikte immediately announced a pending interruption of the proceedings: "I need to warn you, I have to leave at 7:30 for a radio interview on the flotilla." News had recently broken that the Spring Global Sumud Flotilla had been illegally intercepted by Israeli forces in international waters and six South African were among the hundreds of activists abducted and taken off to prison in Israel. It also emerged that the book's co-editor, Farrah, was on the central committee of the Global Sumud Flotilla and had travelled from Algeria that very

morning. That flotilla was not a side note but a parallel text running beneath the evening's proceedings. Here the personal was not merely political, but also practical, urgent, and mobile.

This opening exchange could, in retrospect, easily be a parallel for the book's animating tension: that solidarity is not a sentiment but a set of material infrastructures, often precarious, often under direct threat. Dadoo shared her dry run that day with the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) for upcoming events. Chikte talked about the recent successful Nakba Day at the Castle in Cape Town featuring union leader Zwelinzima Vavi and reported that a few days earlier 114 young learners watched a film about the 16 June 1976 uprising. These were not just an exchange of pleasantries, but evidence of an ecosystem of activism and organising that the book both emerges from and seeks to strengthen.

Chikte's praise for the book was specific: "I really like your book. It would be great if we could segment it into digital parts." Dadoo responded, "I have the book saved as a PDF in parts. I can send each part to you." Herein lay the small but significant understanding that the 320-page print volume, for all its heft, would not reach the TikTok generation. As Dadoo later put it, with brutal honesty: "We are dealing with the TikTok generation. Younger people have a short attention span because of social media." The discussants, in other words, were already imagining the book's remediation, its own fragmentation into teachable, shareable, mobilisable units.

Raouf Farrah's opening: the vacuum and the vision

When Farrah finally arrived − delayed, exhausted, having "been travelling since Saturday" − his opening remarks carried the weight of someone who had crossed not just continents but historical epochs. He began not with the book but with a tribute: "I want to pay tribute to one

of our authors, Muzan Alneel, who sadly passed away a few weeks ago. She was a Sudanese revolutionary and thinker. She wrote a chapter on the role of media in whitewashing the situation in Sudan." In retrospect the mention of Sudan − a country that has been enduring its own catastrophic war − might be taken as a quiet reminder that the collection's subtitle, *Africans in Solidarity for Decolonisation & Liberation*, is not abstract, that the very thread of the book veers towards the material and the 'grounded'.

Farrah then articulated the book's origin with precision: "During the peak of the genocide in Gaza, we felt shocked and broken. We thought we had to do something. Most literature connecting Africa and Palestine focused on South Africa and the parallels between apartheid and Israel. There was a vacuum. The idea of this anthology came from that vacuum." Yet these parallels, and South Africa's clear and brave foreign policy stance on Palestine, he said, is what motivated him and Dadoo to choose this country as a staging ground for the book's launch.

That word "vacuum" is worth pausing over. Farrah was not claiming that no one had written about Africa-Palestine solidarity. On the contrary, he traced a lineage back to the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, where "the fathers of Pan-Africanism put the Palestinian question at the heart of the agenda". He cited the 1960s and 1970s solidarities between resistance movements in Cameroon, Algeria, and Lusophone countries, and between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the ANC. He noted, with gravity, that "the Palestinian declaration of independence was announced in Algeria in 1988".

What had been lost, Farrah argued, was not the history itself but the political language through which that history could be activated. The 1978 Camp David agreements, he said, "softened the language around the Palestinian cause. Palestine was no longer treated as a decolonial question but as a peace-building question." The African Union, he lamented, still "mechanically repeats the two-state solution that has not worked for over

70 years". The vacuum, then, was discursive and political: a collapse of analytical categories that had rendered Palestine a humanitarian problem rather than a structural one.

The book deconstructs the liberal version of history and at the book launch Farrah was performing that deconstruction live. When he said, "We wanted to shine light on these hidden stories that were obscured," he was not engaging in antiquarianism. He was reclaiming a vocabulary − decolonisation, settler-colonialism, armed resistance − that liberal peace-building frameworks had deliberately evacuated.

Suraya Dadoo's intervention: the anti-African elephant in the room

If Farrah provided the historical sweep, Dadoo supplied the uncomfortable specificity. Her opening remarks contained a sentence that hung in the air like a challenge: "As South Africans, I say with shame that the anti-African sentiment in this country is disturbing. I hope this book speaks to that moment."

This was not a conventional book launch observation. Dadoo was naming something that solidarity events often elide: the persistence of xenophobia in South Africa, directed primarily at fellow Africans, even as South Africa positions itself as the moral leader of Palestine solidarity. The book, she made clear, would not allow that contradiction to fester in silence. By including voices from Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Uganda, the collection was deliberately decentring South Africa. "South Africa is widely regarded as one of Palestine's strongest supporters," she acknowledged, "but it was important that the conversation not be dominated entirely by South Africa".

This was not modesty. It was a political argument about the dangers of hegemonic solidarity − the tendency of the most powerful

movement actor to mistake itself for the whole. Dadoo's work with Pan-African Palestine solidarity movements outside South Africa had taught her that "we need Kenyan, Congolese, Ghanaian and Namibian voices talking about Palestine in an Afrocentric way". The book's contributors included Jephta Nguherimo on Namibia, Zahid Rajan on Kenya, the Palestinian ambassador to Cte d'Ivoire, Basem Naim from Hamas, academics such as Shahd Hammouri and Maha Abdallah, and Saleh Hijazi from the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The range was deliberate. The book refused to perform the tidy closure that academic volumes often mistake for rigour. Instead, it holds contradictions in tension: celebrating South Africa's International Court of Justice (ICJ) case against Israel while noting, as Roshan Dadoo's chapter does, that "South Africa is still a major supplier of coal to Israel".

The book's architecture: five movements, one enemy

Farrah's walkthrough of the book's structure was a superlative exposition in political pedagogy.

Part I, *Legacies of Violence*, draws direct lines from the Namibian genocide (1904-1908) to Gaza. Referring to Nguherimo's contribution, Farrah noted, his chapter is "a devastating personal history: his great-great-grandmother died of hunger during that genocide; his great-grandmother survived to tell of concentration camps on Shark Island." This is not analogy. It is continuity − the same settler-colonial logic, the same carceral technologies, the same dehumanising grammar applied to different populations at different moments.

Part II, *Solidarity and Resistance*, contains an interview with Dr Basem Naim of Hamas. Farrah's framing was careful: the chapter "starts not by instrumentalising Palestinian suffering but by clarifying its coordinates from an African perspective". This distinction matters. Too much solidarity literature, Farrah implied, uses Palestinian suffering as a

mirror for Western guilt. This book instead asks: what does Africa's own history of anti-colonial struggle teach us about how to stand with Palestine?

Referring to Part III, *Africa–Israel Collaboration*, Farrah said of Kribsoo Diallo's article, he "writes about the transfer of surveillance technology from Israel to African authoritarian regimes to suppress civil society. Suraya [Dadoo] wrote on Christian Zionism and how faith has been weaponised for the ideological project of Greater Israel." The book amplifies this aspect, noting that "occupied Palestine effectively functions as an open-air laboratory for Israel to test surveillance technology before selling them to repressive regimes around the world in exchange for diplomatic favours".

Part IV, *Reimagining Liberation*, turns toward the future. Hamza Hamouchene writes on the genocide in Gaza: "What is unfolding in Gaza is not merely genocide: it is also ecocide" while Rosebell Kagumire centres Pan-African feminists as "the unsung backbone of solidarity movements".

'Apartheid: Wrong in South Africa, Wrong in Palestine.' How then do we make sense of support for Israel in Africa? *Photo:Sumweekly.com*

The Q&A session: fault lines and clarifications

The question-and-answer session revealed the book's ambitions and its limits. The first questions, "What is Africa?" "Who is Africa?" were deceptively simple. Farrah's response traced a political economy: structural adjustment programmes, US pressure, Israel's "massive courting strategy" that saw Africa as "54 UN votes". But the more revealing answer came later, when an audience member asked about the unity (or lack thereof) between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa on Palestine.

Dadoo's response was admirably granular. "On the issue of reversing Israel's observer status at the African Union, North Africa and Southern Africa were aligned. East and West Africa were on the other side." She then offered a regional breakdown: in West Africa, Pentecostalism has made supporting Israel "a Christian duty"; in East Africa, Israel has positioned itself as "a security partner because of terrorist attacks in Kenya," with the effect that "Palestinians are equated with terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab"; Southern Africa remains strong on Palestine solidarity, "except for Malawi which has a Christian Zionist leader".

This regional specificity is precisely what the book promises. But the Q&A also revealed a tension. When an audience member said, "In my community, solidarity with Palestine has been framed as an Islamic issue, not a universal human problem," Farrah's response was clear: "That is not my vision. The Palestinian cause is a human cause. It is beyond faith and ideology." Yet moments later, he referred to a UN speech by the late PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, about "free monotheism" and distinguished between "settler-colonial Jews from Europe" and Jews who are "Palestinians". Universalism, in other words, was not a blank secularism but a particular conception of religious pluralism rooted in anti-colonial nationalism.

The most charged exchange came around Hamas. An audience member raised the claim that "Hamas is a terrorist organisation with corrupt leadership worth billions". Dadoo did not flinch. She read from her interview with Basem Naim: "He said that like Hamas today, African liberation movements were falsely accused of terrorism. Houari Boumdine, Patrice Lumumba, Dedan Kimathi, Nelson Mandela were all labelled terrorists and hunted down. Their colonisers called on the world to vilify them." Farrah added a note of caution: claims about Hamas leadership's wealth "are often part of Israeli propaganda designed to discredit resistance movements".

Readers of this book looking for a diversity of perspectives on, say, the ethics of armed resistance, could find it one-sided, and the authors' response could be said to confirm this. The book does not pretend to be a 'balanced debate'. It is a rather a declaration of alignment. Whether that is a weakness or strength depends on what one believes the task of political publishing to be.

The regional question: why Africa has not united

One of the evening's most illuminating exchanges concerned the paradox of African UN voting. Dadoo noted that "many countries that have open partnerships with Israel still vote in a pro-Palestine way on most resolutions". Uganda, while strongly influenced by Christian Zionism, "usually supports resolutions critical of Israel". Nigeria and Ghana do the same. An exception is Judge Julia Sebutinde from Uganda. The lone ICJ judge who voted against the majority in South Africa's case against Israel was, Dadoo noted, publicly disavowed by her own government.

This paradox − pro-Palestine votes coexisting with deepening Israel-Africa military and economic ties − is the book's central puzzle. Farrah traced it to the 1990s and early 2000s: "The failure of the Arab revolutions in 2011 to succeed and transition countries into rule-of-law democracies was hampered by the same forces that support Israel today."

The result, he said, is that "the Palestinian cause can no longer count on any Arab country".

The evidence was chilling: "The Sumud Convoy from Mauritania and Algeria through Tunisia is now stopped in Libya at the entrance of Sirte by a military force threatening to kill them if they continue. Forty or fifty years ago, it would have been unthinkable for Arab regimes to threaten peaceful citizens bringing aid to Palestine," said Farrah.

The question that hung in the air was ... whether the solidarity it maps and calls for can be organised at the scale the moment demands.

Conclusion: a book that demands action

The final word belonged to the book's logic. Paraphrasing Farrah, to speak of Africa–Palestine solidarity is to confront a world structured by violence: Gaza's rubble, Sudan's humanitarian crisis, Congo's plundered mines − all reveal the imprint of empire in its many facets.

The book launch was not a celebration. It was a summons. Farrah and Dadoo had come to Cape Town not to sell books but to build a movement. Their book, as Francesca Albanese recognised in her endorsement, is "a long-awaited and much-needed publication" − but only if "long-awaited" is understood as passive waiting. *Rising for Palestine* is not a book to wait for. It is a book to act on.

The question that hung in the air as the audience dispersed was not whether the book succeeds as scholarship − by any measure, it does − but whether the solidarity it maps and calls for can be organised at the scale the moment demands. The genocide in Gaza continues. The

complicity of African states deepens. The youth, as Dadoo noted, scroll through TikTok, their attention fragmented, their political education mediated by algorithms designed to distract.

Yet the evening's concluding vision was rather more sanguine. It was the Sumud Convoy: bodies in motion, ignoring borders, refusing the lie that some lives matter less than others. The book launch was, in its own small way, another convoy − not of trucks but of ideas, crossing checkpoints of indifference and active hostility. Whether those ideas will find purchase in the universities, the pulpits, and the streets of South Africa and beyond is now a question left to those with the energy and motivation to activate and organise.

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