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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Figures of Political Engagement in Palestine: Between the Rationality of Defeat and Liberation

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**ABSTRACT:** In the colonial context of Palestine, the field of political engagement has been shaped since its inception by two opposing rationales: a so-called 'rational and pragmatic' logic, and a logic of 'revolutionary sacrifice'. The former, influenced by a balance of power favorable to the Zionist occupation and its Western allies, reflects a 'realist' approach that accepts the colonial condition, perceived as inescapable, and therefore only seeks to optimize its management. Here, defeat is internalized as material inferiority, legitimizing pragmatic efforts to improve Palestinian lives within the existing order. In contrast, the logic of revolutionary liberation rejects defeat as long as resistance persists, with armed struggle offering a unifying response to the fragmentation imposed on Palestine. This opposition reflects a struggle for legitimacy between two value systems and competing visions of the social world. This article analyzes this structural antagonism through two ideal type figures of political engagement in contemporary Palestine: the technocrat, embodying the rationality of *homo economicus*, and the revolutionary freedom fighter, the *fidai'yi*, representing the rationality of *homo libertatis*. These competing rationalities and meanings of political commitment in turn relate to two different 'Palestines': the 'Palestine of donors,' where the "new Palestinian" invests in state-building; and the anti-colonial "free Palestine," where militants place their struggle in continuity with the liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s. By tracing transformations in political engagement since the 1960s, the article reconstructs the rise of the technocrat, who has progressively overshadowed the sacrificial freedom fighter, before analyzing the latter's recent resurgence.

**KEYWORDS:** Palestine of donors, engagement figures, *homo libertatis*, *fidai'yi*, technocrat

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## 1. Introduction

Since the Al-Aqsa Flood of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing destruction in the Gaza Strip, the debate on the relevance and legitimacy of armed resistance has resurfaced. While some invoke the maxim of Palestinian novelist Ghassan Kanafani<sup>1</sup> - that armed struggle is the path to reclaiming the colonized land, to return, and to achieve collective emancipation, and freedom (Sbeih, 2022) - others, notably spokespersons of the Palestinian Authority (PA), attribute the destruction and loss of life to such resistance. This divergence of perspectives stems from the hierarchical positioning of actors within the social space, which itself is shaped by the intersection of multiple factors specific to the Palestinian context. Among these factors are the 'peace process', the interference of international donors, and the networks they weave within a colonial order that permeates even the most mundane aspects of daily life in Palestine.

To grasp these differences in positioning and perception, this article examines the historical construction of opposing ideal type figures of political commitment, which vary according to the type of rationality that shapes both their sense of belonging as well as their corollary logic of collective action.<sup>2</sup> This construction can be represented as the product of confrontation and struggle between two antagonistic rationales: a technocratic one based on the rationality of *homo economicus*, and a revolutionary militant one grounded in the rationality of *homo libertatis*. From the former emerges the figure of the technocrat - a development 'fighter' - and from the latter arises the revolutionary freedom fighter. The field of political engagement in Palestine becomes the site of a struggle between these two figures. Their ideal-typical construction entails a comparison in terms of rationality, understood as a methodological tool rather than as a "rationalist prejudice" (Weber, 1995: 32). To identify the type of rationality underlying political commitment, the article analyses how the '*les engagés*' - i.e. 'the committed' - (Duclos and Nicourd, 2005) themselves construct the practical meaning of their action.<sup>3</sup> The article thus proceeds to the construction of two configurations (Elias, 1991), within which these forms of commitment operate in contemporary Palestine.

The first is that of the 'Palestine of donors' (Sbeih, 2014). In this configuration of expected economic prosperity promoted following the 1993 Oslo Accords, the "new Palestinian" invests in state-building under the aegis of international donors. Reality is then perceived as a post-conflict situation, and collective action unfolds within neoliberal policy frameworks (Audard, 2009; Rist, 2001; Hanafi and Tabar, 2006). The "new Palestinian", rewarded with the dividends of peace, occupies a central place in this configuration and turns 'development' into a belief that underpins and motivates his or her commitment (Sbeih, 2011). In opposition to this pragmatic rationale - detached from lived experience and from the mechanisms of domination still in place - a second configuration emerges: that of the resistance to the colonial condition (Sbeih, 2024). Within it, militants see their actions in continuity with the armed liberation struggle that characterised the 1960s and 1970s. They reject the *Palestine of donors* and interpret their reality through an anti-colonial lens. The Palestinian Authority (PA), established after the Oslo Accords, is here rejected not only for its authoritarian

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<sup>1</sup> Assassinated in Beirut by Israeli forces in 1972, he became an icon of engaged literature and the Palestinian armed struggle.

<sup>2</sup> "Any concerted action by one or more groups seeking to achieve shared goals" (Fillieule and Péchu, 2009: 9).

<sup>3</sup> This text was translated from French. While 'engagement politique' may seem to literally translate to 'political engagement', there is a strong active connotation in French that there is not present in English. For example, for Sartre the '*intellectuel engagé*' (the 'engaged intellectual') is a politically *committed* intellectual, an activist who acts out of moral duty, not just out of choice. In English, the term has multiple uses and relates more closely to a liberal-democratic tradition rather than to a 'political activist' tradition. Consequently, it may be better suited to translate 'engagement politique' for 'political commitment'. However, because part of the opposition presented in this article relies on a very different type and level of commitment/engagement, it may be more appropriate to keep the translation to 'political engagement'. The reader should however keep this ambiguity in mind when reading the text.

character (Dabed, 2021), but above all for its security function in the service of the Israeli occupier, as Martin Kear's article in this special issue also highlights. The power asymmetry is stacked against these militants and their project, and it follows that their rationality and mode of action are often dismissed as mere 'irrationality' and 'wishful thinking'.

This colonial order, established through violence, can be summed up by two fundamental characteristics: the permanent conquest of space and the ongoing confiscation of time. The first is manifested through 'wandering borders,' constantly redefined in accordance with the ongoing Zionist conquest. The second lies in the confiscation of Palestinian time – past, present, and future (Sbeih, 2018a) – and it is evident in the erasure of their history (Pappé and Jaber, 2014), their constant relegation to a state of waiting and uncertainty (checkpoints, sieges, the transformation of refugee camps into permanent zones of residence), and the deprivation of any capacity to envision or project themselves into the future. These two mechanisms are upheld and perpetuated by violence. The outcome is a colonial situation in the sense defined by Balandier (1955), one that includes a genocidal dimension (Wolfe, 2006), typical of settler-colonial projects involving the replacement of one ethnic group by another.

Within this colonial context, political engagement among Palestinians has, since its inception, been structured around the confrontation between two opposing rationales: a 'rational and pragmatic' one, and one built on 'revolutionary sacrifice'. The former, shaped by the balance of power favourable to the Zionist movement and its Western backers, embodies what is considered a 'realist' line aimed at improving a colonial condition perceived as inescapable. Defeat is internalized as the expression of material inferiority, thereby justifying pragmatic actions aimed at improving the lives of Palestinians within the existing colonial order. In this *Palestine of the donors*, the resignation to the colonial order leads to an acceptance of the imposed fragmentation of the territory and of its people which in turn produces slogans such as "*West Bank First*," which captures this pragmatic diminishing of political and geographic horizons.

In contrast, the revolutionary logic of liberation is founded on the refusal of defeat as long as resistance endures. Here, the unity of the factions through armed struggle constitutes an active response to the fragmentation imposed on Palestine. This structural opposition between the two types of political engagement corresponds to a struggle for legitimacy: a clash between two value systems and two visions of the social world. To legitimize the figure of the technocrat and its pragmatic action amounts to delegitimizing the revolutionary figure, and vice versa. It is an antagonism dating back to the 1930s, when Palestinian society was already divided into two poles structured around the major families: the Nashashibis and the Husseinis.

The few studies devoted to political commitment in Palestine (Bucaille, 2002; Larzillière, 2004) focus primarily on the generations shaped by the two Intifadas (1987 and 2000). They emphasize the disenchantment brought about by the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the subsequent redefinition of forms of political engagement. Other research, including that produced by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, favours a security-oriented and culturalist approach. This article seeks to map the field of political engagement by first reconstructing, and then tracing the evolution of the specific meaning of political engagement in Palestine since the 1960s. It does not limit itself to political organizations and it traces the historical construction of the figure of the technocrat, who has progressively overshadowed that of the *individual of sacrifice*,<sup>4</sup> before analysing the recent reemergence of the latter. The objective is to broaden the understanding of political engagement in examining the types of rationality embodied by these figures. This approach will shed light on

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<sup>4</sup> The freedom fighter does not necessarily embody the dimension of sacrifice inherent in the Arabic figure of the *fiḍa'iyi*—the one who sacrifices himself for the freedom of his homeland and his people. It is from this conception that the notion of the *individual of sacrifice* is proposed.

the divergence of Palestinian perceptions in response to October 7, 2023, and the ensuing genocide, as well as to internal political divisions and the resulting positions.

The article draws on fieldwork conducted between 2007 and 2014 on grassroots activism and the professionalization imposed by international donors, as well as on research carried out between 2010 and 2020. To compensate for the challenges of accessing the terrain of armed resistance—particularly in the northern West Bank since 2020—the discourse of Palestinian martyrs<sup>5</sup> and prisoners (writings, testaments, podcasts) is examined. Travelling to Gaza is not permitted and therefore the third section of the article focuses primarily on the West Bank, while integrating Gaza's symbolic weight in shaping the revolutionary figure.

## 2. From Armed Struggle to Development: A Dual Rationalization of Commitment

### *From Fidā' to Ṣumūd: The Emergence of Economic Resistance*

Starting in 1965, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) officially adopted armed struggle as its strategy for liberation. The logic of *al-fidā'* (literally “self-sacrifice”) was adopted, in the name of sacrificing oneself for a homeland lost and colonized since 1948. From this strategy emerged the figure of the *fidā'īy*, the Palestinian fighter committed to the cause, carrying out military operations from exile. This figure came to embody the reclaiming of lost dignity. The figure of the *fidā'īy* gradually disappeared during the 1980s, particularly following the PLO's departure from Beirut in 1982. Indeed, militarily weakened and distant from Palestine, the PLO adopted a more pragmatic approach. From Tunis, it began forging connections with the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza to assert its influence (Chesnot and Lama, 1998). It then promoted the idea of *ṣumūd* (steadfastness). This new strategy was based on peaceful and popular resistance, aiming at strengthening Palestinians' ability to remain on their land despite the occupation. Jordanian-Palestinian committees and other Palestinian foundations—such as *Ta'awun*, established in the 1980s by Palestinian capitalists based in Geneva—were created at that time. Supported by Arab states opposed to the 1978 Israeli-Egyptian Camp David Accords, their aim was to finance this strategy and build an associative base for the PLO within Palestine (Picaudou, 2006).

Popular committees (*lijān sha'biyya*) affiliated with the PLO's political organizations proliferated, and the number of associations doubled from 1980 onward (MAS, 2008). During the First Intifada (1987–1993), national-level coordination committees emerged before being dismantled by Israel (Hammami, 1995; Hammami and al., 2001). Assistance to *ṣumūd* thus had to function clandestinely.<sup>6</sup> That said, the emphasis placed on economic issues within the PLO's strategy positioned *ṣumūd* and associative mobilization in the 1980s within the framework of economic resistance—or resistance through the economy (Sbeih, 2018b).

### *Pacification via Economic Peace and the Construction of an Alternative Leadership*

Other actors have used the economy and financial aid to weaken the PLO's influence over the Palestinian population and to promote the emergence of an alternative local leadership. Following the logic underpinning the 1978 Egyptian-Israeli Camp David Accords, the Israeli administration began promoting the notion of “economic peace” among Palestinians. This strategy was coordinated with the involvement of donors such as

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<sup>5</sup> As they are commonly referred to in everyday language.

<sup>6</sup> Interviews conducted in Arabic in Hebron, Bethlehem, and Ramallah in 2008–2009 with NGO employees, staff of international organizations, and former volunteers who were members of popular committees in the 1980s. The latter, considered the core of the NGOs that emerged after the Oslo Accords, gradually joined the job market of the donor-driven Palestine.

the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Nakhleh, 2004). The objective was twofold: to sideline exiled leaders who opposed the accords, and to neutralize any inclination toward economic rebellion. This approach to maintaining the colonial order sought to reduce the economy to a tool for pacifying the population by improving its living conditions. The Israeli “civil administration,” under military authority, stepped up its efforts accordingly. It created the Village Leagues (*rawābiṭ al-qurā*) and replaced elected mayors allied with the PLO with more compliant figures.

The use of the economy takes on opposing meanings depending on the actors and their political strategies. For the PLO, it represented resistance through the economy—that is, *sumūd*; for international donors and the Israeli administration, it embodied “economic peace”. Despite their divergent aims, the *sumūd* strategy reflects a pacification of the logic of *fidā*. This is first observable in the shift in the nature of actions and their location: whereas the *fidā* carried out armed operations from exile, *sumūd* manifested as peaceful resistance through the economy from within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). Although it represented a form of economic resistance, its confinement to the OPTs suggested an implicit and gradual adherence by the PLO to the two-state solution. This amounted to a *de facto* recognition of Israel, marking a rupture with the armed struggle that sought the liberation of all of Palestine.

### *Development in the Palestine of donors: the blending of Economic Resistance into Economic Peace*

In 1988, the Algiers Declaration of Independence marked the PLO’s acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) and recognized a Palestinian state limited to the territories occupied in 1967. This renunciation of Mandatory Palestine became official with the Oslo Accords in 1993. In 1998, the PLO’s National Council annulled the articles of the Palestinian National Charter that referred to the goal of eliminating Israel and endorsed the peace process based on the two-state solution. The national struggle had thus evolved from *al-fidā* to *al-ṣumūd*, aligning the claims of the PLO with international norms and legal frameworks. The PLO’s strategy now rested on the implementation of collective state-building and development projects for peace, increasingly relying on international aid.

Arab donors, who had historically supported *ṣumūd*, also came to adopt the notion of development as defined by international funding agencies. The *Ta’awun* foundation thus became an intermediary of the World Bank, which began financing it in 1997 to implement a project aimed at strengthening “civil society” and disseminating neoliberal orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> To describe this new configuration, the expression *the Palestine of donors* is used. It refers to the idea that economic peace absorbs the strategy of economic resistance. This expression highlights the structuring influence of international donors on both the perception of reality and the orientation of actions. Their performative discourse constructs a “virtual reality” (Rist, 2001: 342; Escobar, 1995), built on the illusion of a “post-conflict” situation (Hanafi and Tabar, 2006), of peace and development, even as Israel continued its colonization. Development superseded politics in a context where “the United States plays, the European Union pays, and the World Bank rules” (Le More, 2008: 19).

Colonization accelerated and new settlements were built, while the territories became increasingly fragmented by the Wall, bypass roads, and checkpoints (Blanc et al., 2007). Yet, the dominant discourse represented a discursive rupture disconnected from the ongoing colonial reality. Development was and still is

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<sup>7</sup> In its third phase, this project led to the establishment of the NGO Development Center (NDC) in 2006. According to Nakhleh (2011), the founders of *Ta’awun* took advantage of their connections with the political leadership of the PLO in the 1980s to push them toward accepting a two-state political solution. Some of the businesses created in the OPTs following the Oslo Accords were monopolized by these founders, who also captured a significant portion of international aid.

promoted as a new cause, presented as a “technical recipe” that evacuates any reference to the political (Rist, 2001). Within this configuration, political organizations - viewed as obstacles to development and hotbeds of corruption - were excluded (Sbeih, 2018c). “Civil society”<sup>8</sup> and NGOs emerged as the new counterweights to the Palestinian Authority (PA), limiting its role within a supposedly self-regulating market.

International aid became the main source of employment. While associations affiliated with parties opposed to the Oslo Accords were sidelined, the PA and the NGOs linked to left-wing parties compete for integration into the “international aid chain” (Naqib, 2000: 614; Hanafi and Tabar, 2006). Leftist political organizations pay their activists through NGOs, while the PA favours Fatah-affiliated individuals. These NGOs sometimes indirectly fund partisan activities and become the primary space for political expression, including opposition to the PA and the Oslo Accords. Political organizations come to rely on their affiliated associations, which—under the banner of professionalization—strengthens their ties with donors while distancing themselves from politics. A new logic of engagement emerges: the “rationality” of development and of *homo economicus* supplants patriotic militancy, thereby redefining both the meaning of the political and the modes of action in Palestine.

### *Reforming to Exclude: The Marginalization of the Remaining Fidā'iyīn*

Yasser Arafat, known for his gun at the hip and military uniform as a well as for his Nobel Peace Prize, could alternate between the figure of the *fidā'iy* and that of the man of peace. Before his death, the ‘international community’ demanded strict reforms in exchange for financial support to the PA. These reforms took the form of amendments to the Palestinian Basic Law and the adoption of the Road Map in 2003. The aim was to curtail Arafat’s powers by imposing the creation of the position of Prime Minister. Centred on security, the Road Map<sup>9</sup> called for a restructuring of the PA’s security services under the authority of an Interior Minister with broad prerogatives. The idea was to combat “terrorism” and unconditionally eliminate all forms of Palestinian violence. International funding was to be channelled exclusively through a treasury under the supervision of the finance minister. Finally, the Road Map emphasized donor support for “civil society” as a crucial actor in development.

In this context of ‘reforms’, the first government, formed in March 2003, included three so-called moderate figures who were in opposition to Arafat: Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen),<sup>10</sup> appointed Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, was a critic of the militarization of the Second Intifada; Mohammad Dahlan, Minister for Security Affairs, reproached Arafat for running the PA with the old guard; and finally, Salam Fayyad, a former employee of international organizations, was appointed Finance Minister and tasked with enforcing financial transparency and combating corruption.

In short, the reforms implicitly aimed at sidelining Yasser Arafat, and with him what remained of the *fidā'iy* figure. His death in 2004 paved the way for his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, the architect of the Oslo Accords, a suit-and-tie figure staunchly opposed to the very idea of armed resistance.

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of “civil society” has been co-opted by neoliberal economic discourse, particularly since the Washington Consensus of 1989. Its frequent use refers to the image of an “entity” that stands between the public sector and the market and is supposed to ensure the latter’s self-regulation.

<sup>9</sup> The Road Map for Peace, adopted by the Quartet (the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union, and the United Nations) in April 2003, aimed to achieve a comprehensive and final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Tensions between the two men were such that Arafat referred to Abu Mazen as the “Karzai of Palestine,” alluding to the Afghan president who rose to power with American backing.

### *Strategic Shift within the Islamic Movement: Dissent and Armed Resistance*

In contrast to the PLO's increasingly pacified modes of struggle and the integration of the NGOs associated with it into the *Palestine of the donors*, associations close to Hamas were excluded from this rising configuration. Hamas embodies a direct opposition (*munāhada*) to the Palestinian Authority and the Oslo Accords. The associations affiliated with it have gained the trust of the population precisely because of their independence from Western donors, who are often accused of allocating resources to experts' salaries and to projects frequently disconnected from the actual needs of Palestinians (Schaeublin, 2009). In addition to the international networks of the Muslim Brotherhood, their funding relies on members' contributions, the local population, and volunteer-based structures such as the Zakat Committees. Their importance has grown to the extent that their numbers doubled during the 2000s (MAS, 2008).

Despite its opposition to the Oslo Accords, Hamas nonetheless participated in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, signalling a potential strategic shift — possibly even an implicit recognition of Israel. Following its electoral victory, Israel arrested the majority of the elected parliamentarians, thereby completely paralyzing the Legislative Council. Refusing to officially recognize the State of Israel and to renounce armed resistance, Hamas was designated a “terrorist” organization by the international community. Consequently, both the government it formed in 2006, and the national unity cabinet established in 2007 were boycotted by international donors.

Unable to pay PA salaries for eighteen months and lacking control over civil servants loyal to Fatah, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by force in 2007. Fatah's power was henceforth confined to the West Bank, while Israel maintained effective control over all the territories. In response, the PA President declared a state of emergency in the West Bank in 2007 and issued a decree mandating a review of all registered associations, subjecting their approval to security agencies. The PA dissolved the Zakat Committees in the West Bank (Schaeublin, 2009: 19) and shut down several Islamic associations.

Since 2007, the intra-Palestinian division has taken on a geographic natura: Gaza versus the West Bank. While the figure of the resistance fighter prevails in Gaza, a new political figure has emerged in the West Bank: the technocrat. Constructed in opposition to the militant activist, this figure contributes to the latter's symbolic disqualification and to the establishment of a new value system in which patriotic politics is devalued. It also redefines the criteria of political legitimacy by reconfiguring the relationship between expertise and political commitments. In this context, the figure of the technocrat, embodied by Salam Fayyad, came to be seen as an alternative model.

### **3. The Emergence of the Universal Technocrat in *Palestine of donors***

Salam Fayyad, born in 1952 and holding a PhD in economics, is known for his work as an expert for the World Bank in Washington (1987-1994) and as the International Monetary Fund representative in Palestine (1995–2001). Despite receiving only 2.5% of the vote in the January 2006 legislative elections with his political party The Third Way, he was nonetheless appointed Prime Minister in 2007. In contrast to the governments boycotted by international donors between 2006 and 2007, Fayyad enjoyed unprecedented international support for his technocratic credentials and his development expertise during his tenure as Finance Minister (2002–2007). Following the Palestinian political split, he formed an emergency government in 2007, followed by several technocratic cabinets, until his resignation in 2013.

The Fayyad Plan transformed development into an official project of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.<sup>11</sup> As Fayyad himself stated:

"Some say: 'What's the point of talking about development while we are under occupation, subjected to checkpoints and Judaization?' My response is that development preserves our identity, builds the State, strengthens our position at the Arab and international levels, and reinforces our people's *ṣumūd* (steadfastness)." (*Salam Fayyad, Palestinian Press, Maannews, February 6, 2011*)

The occupation is thus perceived as one variable among others, rather than as the structural condition shaping Palestinian life. It is no longer seen as incompatible with development, which is now a belief system - a cause that professionals actively commit to as 'development fighters.'<sup>12</sup> It is within this context that the figure of the technocrat, or development professional, emerges. This figure has come to dominate the Palestinian Authority's cabinets (Fayyad's successors — academics and economists<sup>13</sup>— all present themselves as technocrats) and spread across the NGO sector. Government and NGOs then intersect and reinforce each other, and the technocratic figure consolidates its position within the field of power (Sbeih, 2014). It is founded on the economic rationality of *homo economicus* in its neoliberal sense (Rist, 2011), placing the focus on individuals and their skills. Likewise, it disregards structural conditions and mechanisms of domination. Ultimately, it draws on international law and the standards set by international donors to shape its course of action.

### *The West Bank First: Institutionalizing Division and Reconfiguring Politics*

According to the programs published in 2007 and 2008 – "*Building a Palestinian State: Towards Peace and Prosperity*" and the "*Palestinian Reform and Development Plan*" – the implementation of the Fayyad Plan, financed by international donors, was to begin in the West Bank, with the hope of eventually replicating the experience in Gaza (PNA, 2007). Relegating Gaza to a secondary status reflected a strategy of managing internal divisions: "*West Bank First*," given that the Gaza Strip was under Hamas control.

This internal division became institutionalized and acquired a geographic dimension: the logic of 'peace dividends' promoted by international donors comes to justify rewarding the West Bank while sanctioning Gaza.<sup>14</sup> These programs were guided by a neoliberal economic rationale, adopting free market ideology while explicitly distancing themselves from any patriotic political considerations, viewed as disruptive. Ministerial appointments were thus based on criteria of competence and specialization. Cabinets were composed of civil society figures widely recognized for their expertise (PNA, 2008). The use of the concept of "civil society" signalled a break from the political sphere, seen as weakened by internal divisions, plagued by clientelism, and consumed by a thirst for power.

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<sup>11</sup> The Fayyad Plan refers to the political and economic program implemented by the successive cabinets formed under his leadership between 2007 and 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Development professionals assert their commitment to development while emphasizing their distance from the political sphere. The commitment to the cause of development thereby becomes an 'apolitical form of political commitment'.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Rami Hamdallah served as Prime Minister from 2013 to 2018 and was also President of Al-Najah University. He was succeeded by economist Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh (2019–2024), followed in 2025 by another economist, Dr. Mohammad Mustafa.

<sup>14</sup> As expressed by a representative of European donors during an interview in Ramallah in 2009.

Moreover, the security coordination (*al-tansiq al-amni*) between the PA's security agencies and the occupying forces intensified under the supervision of American generals.<sup>15</sup> General Keith Dayton proudly hailed the emergence of what he called the "new Palestinian." In the name of austerity and professionalization, Fayyad's plan sought to depoliticize the security forces and sever them from "any nationalist grounding deemed partisan" (Legrain, 2010: 12). Another objective was to dismantle Hamas's infrastructure in the West Bank, including its network of associations (Roy, 2000). Several were shut down, committees were dissolved, and hundreds of activists were arrested by both the PA and the Israeli army. Additionally, this process led to the dismissal of civil servants affiliated with Fatah and suspected of involvement in armed resistance.

It is within this context that Fayyad's reform plan was warmly received at the Paris Donors' Conference in 2007. These reforms were aligned with the spirit of the 2003 Road Map. In both the United States and France, Fayyad was praised. His efforts in terms of "governance," public financial management, and security were viewed as generating positive outcomes on both political and economic fronts.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Friedman (2009a; 2009b) even coined the term *Fayyadism*, in contrast to *Arafatism*. According to him, it embodied a new principle of legitimacy that should inspire Arab leaders: transparency and administrative accountability were to replace slogans of resistance. Nathan Thrall (2010) went further, referring to Fayyad as "our man in Palestine." *Fayyadism* thus came to be seen as "the most exciting idea in Arab governance ever" (Hadad, 2009). Fayyad's reforms represented a break with past practices. Professionalism and meritocracy were the proposed responses to the mismanagement associated with Arafat's militant leadership. For the international community, these reforms were meant to end armed resistance and pacify the youth. *Fayyadism* therefore signalled an implicit condemnation of past resistance practices. It aligned with the political vision of Mahmoud Abbas, who consistently denounced armed resistance, deeming it absurd and irrational. In his view, it merely provides Israel with the pretext to destroy everything, given the imbalance of power. This reflects a rejection of the resistance model in favour of a technocratic mode of governance. The rupture introduced here marks the construction of a new value system whose legitimacy is grounded in the 'governance model' and in the ascendance of the figure of the technocrat.

### *Society as a Matter of Project Management*

This transformation draws its legitimacy from the neoliberal model of governance, conceived as a universal technique of government and managerial normalization of the political field (Atlani-Duault, 2005; Juguet, 2022). Management practices and the language of numbers reign supreme. The discourse is flooded with numbers and statistics, presented as objective data, detached from any history, context, or power relations. Poverty and unemployment rates are highlighted, but the processes of impoverishment and resource confiscation are never truly questioned. The so-called 'invisible hand' is mobilised to effectively ensure the disappearance of the very visible hand of the colonial order.

Society thus becomes a matter of management, governed by supposedly universal and neutral norms (Benedetto and al., 2011). Life is also conceived as a "*succession of projects*": one ends so that another can begin (Sbeih 2018a; 2018c).<sup>17</sup> The future can only mean progress, thanks to technocrats capable of

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<sup>15</sup> Appointed as U.S. Security Coordinators (USSC) for Israel and the Palestinian Authority were General Keith Dayton in November 2005 (coming from Iraq), followed by General Michael Moeller in October 2010, and then Admiral Paul Bushong in June 2012.

<sup>16</sup> According to statements made by Pierre Duquesne, French ambassador in charge of economic, reconstruction, and development issues, during a talk on December 11, 2009, as part of a workshop on cooperation in the Palestinian Territories organized at the French Development Agency in Paris (Duquesne, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Much like the "project-oriented polity" (or "projective city") conceptualized by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).

transforming uncertainty into measurable and reducible risk.<sup>18</sup> Everything must be “formalizable and calculable” by eradicating “all that is not ‘rational’” (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999: 151). This is the meaning of the economic rationality of *homo economicus* shaping the figure of the technocrat. On paper, the technocrats “are eager [...] to create the infrastructure of a Palestinian state within two years [the Fayyad plan], under the feet of the occupier”. They “sail on the present,” and “for them there is no future, no past... since they have broken away from political considerations and therefore from any long-term strategy, it is the ‘now that counts’” (Heacock, 2011: 39–42).

To protect against dependency on international donors, Fayyad implemented neoliberal policies encouraging a Palestinian consumption model heavily reliant on imports rather than local production. This is a strictly budgetary vision, with no public investment in productive or transformative infrastructure. The aim was to broaden the PA’s tax revenues by inflating customs clearance transfers from the Israeli Treasury. However, the Israeli Treasury continuously withheld these transfers, to the extent that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2019) described the practice as “*fiscal costs of the occupation*.” The total amount withheld could not only have eliminated the PA’s budget deficit—especially given the “historic low” (Europe 1 avec AFP, 2022) in international aid in 2019—but likely would have generated a surplus (UNCTAD, 2018; 2019a; 2019b).

The colonial condition asserts itself even when technocrats refuse to acknowledge it. In short, Palestinians live on credit to finance a Palestinian Authority (PA) unable to pay its civil servants’ salaries (Sbeih, 2023). The promised development and economic prosperity are nothing more than illusions. Nevertheless, the transformation runs deep. International intervention becomes a “right” (Hardt and Negri, 2004), and the implementation of neoliberal policies contributes to subjugation to the market economy (Audard, 2009; Polanyi, 2015 [1944]) and to the emergence of a consumer society. The figure of the technocrat persists; their rational form of political engagement offers a more acceptable image than that of armed resistance. This is how advocacy emerges as a new form of engagement.

### *Advocacy: Professional Activist Engagement through International Law*

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords, NGOs such as the *Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy (PCPD)* were created. Their objective was to promote peace and the two-state solution. This new form of activism centred on international law, particularly the four Geneva Conventions (on international humanitarian law) and United Nations resolutions.<sup>19</sup> A similar logic emerged within NGOs established prior to this period, such as the NGO *PARC – Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees* and *YMCA-EJ – The East Jerusalem Young Men Christian Association*. In the name of professionalization, these organizations underwent progressive restructuring. A shift in the language used in their reports is particularly noticeable: the term “occupation” was gradually replaced by “Israel”, and the concept of *sumud* was reframed as “resistant-oriented development” (*tanmia muqawima*), as shown in PARC’s annual reports from the 1990s. Starting with the Second Intifada, lobbying units and advocacy programs were incorporated into their structures. Still pursuing the goal of public awareness, several associative networks emerged during the Second Intifada of 2000, such

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<sup>18</sup> Here, I draw on the rationalization process as illustrated in the conceptual framework developed by economist Knight concerning decision-makers (Bouvier-Patron, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Annual report of the PCDP (2007), as well as an interview conducted in Ramallah in 2008 with its director.

as *OPGAI*<sup>20</sup> and the *Kairos Palestine* appeal.<sup>21</sup> Their reference framework is the “rights-based approach”, rooted in legal discourse rather than the nationalistic claims of the *fida’yi* figure. Non-violence characterizes the nature of this new mode of engagement: advocacy.

Advocacy is not limited to raising awareness among Palestinians; it primarily targets international audiences. International volunteers and salaried staff increasingly operate alongside ‘professionalized’ Palestinian workers to carry out this ‘development’. Initially perceived by NGO employees - many of whom were former activists in political organizations - as a return to militant engagement after a period of depoliticization, and as a new resource at their disposal, advocacy has progressively revealed itself to be an elitist form of action. New ways of rising or falling through the ranks emerged. **“Professionalism”** emerged as a key marker of distinction—understood in practice as proficiency in English, fluency in neoliberal rhetoric, and adherence to new political claims grounded in international law. Emphasis is thus placed on non-violent and ‘civilized’ action, aimed at building ‘peace’, in contrast to the armed struggle of the *fida’yi*, which is viewed as counterproductive and irrational, and often labelled as terrorism.

Moreover, advocacy is in principle based on communication, unlike the confrontational action of the *fida’yi*, which required physical presence in the street.<sup>22</sup> It is an action that can be carried out from offices by technocrats. Their language is ‘universal’, not rooted in ‘particularistic’ values stemming from patriotic aspirations, as was the case with the *fida’yi*. This is a discourse of political engagement grounded in international law, which is difficult to challenge globally, as it addresses the international community, whose influence is decisive in the *Palestine of donors*. Today, winning “international sympathy” has become the main concern of the Palestinian leadership (Agha and Khalidi, 2017) and the technocrats. Advocacy boils down to trying to prove that Palestinians are entitled to a state, or at the very least, the right to live. This is reflected in the way Palestinian officials celebrate seemingly international or ‘modern’ events and their enthusiasm for Guinness World Records or the classification of traditional clothing by UNESCO. Non-events are thus transformed into success stories and victories for the people and their cause (Sbeih, 2018a).

Image and staging play a central role in advocacy. In an Arabic-language interview on Israeli television, Marshal Jibril Rajoub<sup>23</sup> emphasized the importance of image through sport. In a highly caricatured way, he stated: “what is better - that the world sees us masked [a reference to Palestinian fighters covering their faces with a *keffiyeh*], or in shorts? That the world sees our girls veiled, or practicing sport in shorts?” (Wattan Agency News, 2012). The contempt he expresses toward the figure of the fighter and the veil reflects an internalized sense of inferiority — not only of oneself, but of everything associated with “particularistic” values and mores. It also reveals a fascination with what is perceived as universal and modern. From this

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<sup>20</sup> Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative, established in 2005. Interviews conducted in Paris and Beit Sahour between 2007 and 2009 with its founder.

<sup>21</sup> *Kairos* (biblical meaning: the moment chosen by God) is an appeal issued in 2009 by sixteen Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem and disseminated by the World Council of Churches. It is an advocacy call for justice, peace, and reconciliation based on the principles of dialogue. Its authors thus promote nonviolent action and are opposed to any form of violent resistance. Interviews conducted in Beit Sahour in 2008 with one of its founders.

<sup>22</sup> I draw here on the conceptual opposition developed by Goffman (1970) and further elaborated by Dobry (2009: 174–177). It is the ideal-typical distinction between the “tight game,” in which direct actions alter the protagonists’ situation, and the “loose game,” in which actions are indirect, mediated, and rely on communication and information exchange. Advocacy thus falls within the framework of the latter.

<sup>23</sup> Appointed marshal by presidential decree on March 31, 2021, Jibril Rajoub headed the Palestinian Preventive Security Forces from 1995 to 2002. For the past decade, he has (or had) officially led several bodies: the Palestinian Football Association; the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (despite his age, 68); and the Palestinian Olympic Committee.

perspective, the image of the ‘new Palestinian’ that technocrats seek to project is built on a fantasized modernity, embodying the imperialism of the universal.

Improving the PA’s image in the eyes of the international community involves both its security role in combating “terrorism” and its international advocacy efforts, which rely on the language of law as the legitimate framework of rational engagement. This is a mediated (rather than confrontational) and elitist form of action, implying a new meaning of political engagement. It stands in stark opposition—not in complementarity—to armed struggle, an approach that challenges the very foundations of the *Palestine of the donors*. Advocacy thus serves as a form of political engagement that gives meaning to the figure of the technocrat while delegitimizing violent forms of engagement, such as that of the *fida’yi*.

## 5. The Return of the *Fida’yi*: symbolic unity through armed struggle

Unlike the *Palestine of donors*, which obscures the colonial order, the individual of *sacrifice* constructs the *homo libertatis* rationality on the acknowledgement of their colonised condition in a colonial order established and maintained through violence. In such a condition, the use of violence is not a choice but a rational necessity. According to Fanon (1961), violence is a means for the colonized to reclaim the humanity that has been usurped from them. Under this lens, violence then constitutes a rational response to dehumanization. The slogans of Palestinian revolutionaries reflect this and emphasise dignity and equality with the adversary: “Do not die before being a worthy, upright, and free adversary”,<sup>24</sup> or “You are not defeated as long as you resist.”<sup>25</sup>

In this sense, the *individual of sacrifice* resorts to violence to reclaim authorship over their life and destiny, after having been structurally reduced to an object and a permanent victim of the colonizer. This is not a desperate individual, but rather a subject of hope, endowed with a rationality rooted in a clear awareness of their colonial condition. Lacking other means, their own death becomes the vehicle for disseminating this rationality.

This configuration constitutes an implicit response to the pragmatic slogan “West Bank First.” It materialized on May 10, 2021, when Hamas, from Gaza, issued an ultimatum to Israel demanding the withdrawal of its security forces from the Al-Aqsa compound and the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, where several Palestinian families were facing expulsion. Upon expiration of the ultimatum, the operation “*Sword of Jerusalem*” was launched and rockets from Gaza were launched toward Israel. Through this act, a symbolic unity of the Palestinians was enacted: those from 1948 (citizens of Israel), from Jerusalem, and from the West Bank took to the streets while Gaza took the initiative in the armed confrontation - not in response to an Israeli attack, as is often the case, but as an act to defend the Palestinians of Jerusalem.

Despite the siege imposed on Gaza, the rationality of the *individual of sacrifice* has been institutionalized under Hamas's authority. The strip has come to stand as a model, radiating symbolic and emotional power toward the West Bank. This dynamic has accelerated the collective resurgence of the *fida’yi* figure in the West Bank—a resurgence that had already been quietly reemerging in recent years, despite the structural constraints imposed both by the Israeli occupation and by the *Palestine of donors*.

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<sup>24</sup> This Arabic slogan, *La tamut qabl an takun niddan* (“Do not die before becoming a worthy adversary”), is taken from a text by Ghassan Kanafani. It is commonly attributed to Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad, two historical figures of Fatah and the PLO, assassinated in Tunis in 1988 and 1991, respectively.

<sup>25</sup> This slogan is taken from a text by the Lebanese Marxist philosopher Mehdi Amel, an engaged intellectual who was assassinated in Beirut in 1987. It embodies a vision of resistance grounded in dignity and steadfastness in struggle.

## *Awareness Through Blood: The Living Martyrs or the Fighting Intellectual*

“Resistance is a utility that strengthens over time” (*al-muqāwama jadwā mustamirra*), wrote Basel al-Araj on social media. Born in 1984 in al-Walaja, a village near Jerusalem, Basel was a pharmacist. He devoted his life to the creation of popular universities, which he co-founded with a sociologist at Birzeit University. Their goal was to develop a critical analysis of the colonial situation in Palestine and to mobilize the population - especially the youth - toward resistance. Drawing inspiration from Ghassan Kanafani, Frantz Fanon, and Mehdi Amel, he conducted research on the figures of Palestinian resistance since the beginning of the colonization. He shed light on how some of these figures were labelled as “outlaws” by the British administration during the Mandate.

Following Ghassan Kanafani, he paid particular attention to the 1936 revolution and compared the Palestinian struggle to the Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions. A fierce critic of the Palestinian Authority and its security-driven vision, he advocated direct confrontation with the occupier while rejecting internal divisions.<sup>26</sup> “The Palestinian people can bear the loss of thousands of martyrs killed by Israelis, but not a single one caused by internal division,” he wrote on his Facebook page before deactivating it in 2016. Accused of forming armed resistance cells in the West Bank, he was arrested in April 2016 along with other comrades by the Palestinian security services, who justified the detention as a means of “protecting them from the Israelis.”<sup>27</sup> Tortured, he began a hunger strike until his release. Once released thanks to popular pressure, the Israeli army went after him and he went underground. In March 2017, an Israeli special unit surrounded his hiding place in Ramallah, just a few hundred meters from the office of the Palestinian President. Armed with an automatic rifle, he engaged in his first and final battle. He left behind a room full of books, a brief testament, and a new figure of resistance: the intellectual fighter.

The figure of the intellectual here embodies his thought. He shifts the intellectual’s action from the realm of ideas to that of armed struggle and confrontation. In his testament, he challenges those who read him after his death to find their own answers. As for him - read only because he is dead - he has nothing to say to the living, for he has already found his answer. “*I have found my answers*” became the title of a posthumous book published in 2018 in Beirut (Bisan Editions), which brings together part of his writings. After his death, a dozen articles and books referred to the return of the *intellectual fighter* (*al-muthaqaf al-mushtabik*). These writings denounce the figure of the *intellectual functionary* (*al-muthaqaf al-muwazzaf*), subservient to political power (Darraj, 1996). They highlight the contradictions of such an intellectual: a comfortable life, detached from the misery they nonetheless claim to speak for.

In other words, the figure of the intellectual fighter rekindles an old debate about the role of the intellectual, their social function, commitment to the Palestinian cause, and their capacity for mobilization – a role Ghassan Kanafani had already filled in the 1960s. Here, the intellectual is defined by their “*commitment to the cause*” (*al-thaqāfa iltizām*), rather than the disengaged idea of “*art for art’s sake*.”

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<sup>26</sup> This criticism of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which advocates for a project of resistance, has been growing on social media. The case of Nizar Banat, who regularly shared his videos, is a notable example. In his final critiques, in May 2021, he threatened to inform international donors that their aid was being used by Palestinian officials to enrich themselves and oppress the Palestinian people. Preventive security forces raided his hideout—a house belonging to relatives, located in the center of Hebron, an area under exclusive Israeli control (Zone C). Awakened by blows from crowbars, he died instantly.

<sup>27</sup> Defenders and spokespersons of the Palestinian Authority (PA) frequently invoke this line of argument to justify the arrest of resistance fighters, even as the Israeli army was bombing PA headquarters during the Second Intifada.

### *Prison as a Battleground*

Political prisoners play a central role in shaping the figure of the intellectual fighter. The prison itself functions as a “site of engagement and confrontation” (Sbeih, 2024), a notion expressed in the philosophy of the point of confrontation (*falsafat nuqtat al-ishtibak*), developed by Wael Jaghoub. Jaghoub accumulated multiple sentences for his involvement in the FPLP’s armed wing, and ended up spending nearly 30 years in prison. Nevertheless, he contributed significantly to the literary field particularly through his Gramsci-inspired letters. He was released on 25 January 2025 during the first phase of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas. Despite Israeli threats, he declared publicly that the events of 7 October meant that “life imprisonment now belongs to the past” (Jaghoub, 2025). Drawing on Ghassan Kanafani’s call to break down doors and Mahmoud Darwish’s cultivation of hope, he emphasized the importance of dreaming in the face of the “defeated realism” of the Palestinian leadership which, since the Oslo Accords, has increasingly demonized and delegitimized resistance. For Jaghoub, confrontation remains inevitable, even in prison. He was rearrested in May 2025 and placed under administrative detention.

The figure of the prisoner stands as a central pillar of the *fida’yi*. As previously discussed, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has pursued a strategy of weakening the symbols of resistance within the framework of its security coordination with Israel. This policy has intensified, particularly during negotiations over the release of thousands of prisoners as part of ceasefire agreements in Gaza. The Israeli government, with the support of its international partners, has reiterated its demand that the PA stop paying allowances to prisoners. On February 10, 2025, the PA complied, and a presidential decree abolished the system of financial payments to the families of prisoners, martyrs, and the wounded. This responsibility was transferred from the Ministry of Social Development to the *Tamkeen* association. This decision marks a process of *de-symbolization* of the prisoner issue, aiming to frame it solely in economic and social terms, stripping it of its symbolic, national, and patriotic capital. At the same time, a social media campaign seeks to delegitimize prisoners by questioning their ability to assume political responsibility. In anticipation of a possible release of Marwan Barghouti - a Fatah figure imprisoned since the Second Intifada - this campaign draws a parallel with Yahya Sinwar, a former prisoner released in 2011 and a leader of Hamas in Gaza held responsible for the October 7 attack. Comments, often from fake accounts, suggest that Barghouti should not play any role in the West Bank to avoid a “repetition of Gaza’s destruction” allegedly caused by Sinwar.

### *The Refugee Camp: Hearth and Symbol*

In 2022, around a hundred young Palestinians, aged between 17 and 34, took up arms to confront the Israeli army and settlers in the West Bank. Scenes of assassination - some of which were filmed and broadcast by the Israeli army - as well as numerous testimonies, illustrate the determination of these youths who, despite injuries, rise again to continue the fight. Armed with a pistol or a locally hand-made automatic weapon, facing an army, death is certainly expected—but it is a dignified death. The message they send to Palestinians is clear: to die for the cause to encourage others to follow in their footsteps in the struggle for the liberation of the homeland. These living-dead are also aware that their death can be staged and become an object of awareness-raising, without it being seen as overblown or moralizing discourse. Another idea emerges from their testaments: “*We are no longer pacified victims who have internalized defeat, but fighters—true rivals capable*

*of choosing the moment to die with dignity.*"<sup>28</sup> This new figure, linked to sacrifice for the homeland, resembles that of the *fida'i*, who sacrificed himself for the cause so that his compatriots could live with dignity and freedom. His return is not an abstract construct: it is empirically observable and built locally, before the eyes of the population, live on television and on social media. The promotion of this figure and of his rationality—through blood and sacrifice—imposes itself after two decades dominated by the figure of the *development professional*.

### *The Cost of Commitment and the Jenin Refugee Camp as a Focal Point of Resistance*

The cost of this commitment is so heavy that it goes beyond the loss of the individual's life, systematically affecting the entire family. House demolitions and other forms of collective punishment - arrests, employment bans, restrictions on mobility including between Palestinian cities in the West Bank - are carried out by both Israeli forces and Palestinian security agencies. However, symbolic rewards are also significant: hundreds of thousands of people attend their funerals, songs are quickly composed to glorify their names, and newborns are now given the names of martyr-heroes. The Jenin refugee camp has become the primary stronghold of resistance in the West Bank, particularly after the assassination of most of the founders of the *Lion's Den* in Nablus.<sup>29</sup> In this northern area of the West Bank, the legacy of the Second Intifada remains ever-present. Members of these groups come from across the political spectrum. Most have a relative who has either been martyred or is imprisoned in Israeli jails. The message conveyed by these groups is one of unity among the Palestinian people—whether living in the West Bank, Gaza, Akka, or Lebanon—breaking away from the slogan "*West Bank First*," embodied in the *Palestine of donors*. This model of resistance in the West Bank also draws strength from heroic images of resistance coming from Gaza, especially those showing Palestinian fighters confronting Israeli tanks at point-blank range. To suppress this model, the PA launched Operation "*Protection of the Homeland*" on December 5, 2024. Its forces besieged the Jenin refugee camp to eliminate the so-called "outlaws." The Jenin Brigades were the primary target. PA spokespeople, including its president, stated that no pretext should be given to Israel to reproduce in Jenin the destruction seen in Gaza. They claimed that this meant fighting against actions deemed "*irresponsible, reckless, and blind to their destructive consequences.*" They accused these groups of working for an "*Iranian agenda.*"

On January 21, 2025, the Israeli army took over with an operation it named "Iron Wall," a title borrowed from the article by Ze'ev Jabotinsky published in 1923. Positioned even further to the right of David Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky saw no other outcome for the Zionists than the use of force against the Palestinians, stating: "let the reader go over all the cases of colonization in other countries. He will not find a single instance in which it took place with the consent of the native population." For him, the Zionist colonial project had to be enforced through strength. This idea remains dear to Netanyahu, who follows in the footsteps of his father, the former personal secretary to Jabotinsky in the 1940s (Tribune Juive, 2020).

To destroy the camp as a bastion of resistance also means to strip it of its symbolic value, a place imbued with patriotic meaning - particularly in what it represents regarding the right of return.

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<sup>28</sup> The recordings of Ibrahim Al-Nabulsi (19 years old) made before his assassination in Nablus on August 9, 2022, as well as the will of Udai Al-Tamimi (19 years old), who was killed during his attack on a checkpoint at the entrance of the Ma'ale Adumim settlement on October 19, 2022, armed with only a handgun, reflect this idea.

<sup>29</sup> Nicknamed "the Lion of Nablus" before his assassination, Ibrahim Al-Nabulsi –mentioned above – was one of the founders of this militant group, which emerged during 2022 in Nablus's Old City.

## 6. Conclusion

The technocrat is the product of a long and dual rationalization process within the PLO's strategy: from armed struggle in the 1970s, to economic resistance in the 1980s, and finally to universal development in the *Palestine of donors*. In contrast, with the emergence of Hamas in 1987, the national question was reintegrated into a divergent trajectory—one centred on armed resistance. The return of the revolutionary individual reflects the affirmation of a form of rationality that breaks away from that embodied by the technocratic figure. The figure of the *individual of sacrifice, al-fida'yi*, and the rationality of militant commitment have imposed themselves after two decades dominated by the technocratic figure—the development fighter: a calculating individual, detached from context and history. *Homo libertatis* challenges the rationality of *homo economicus*. While the former stands for the ideas of commitment and sacrifice, emphasizes the ongoing reality of the colonial order, and resists geographic fragmentation through armed struggle, which stands for Palestinian unity; the latter is supported by international donors and neoliberal orthodoxy, internalizes fragmentation, and embraces a "*West Bank first*" development approach that erases history, context, and structures of domination.

The struggle between these two modes of engagement, constructed in opposition to one another, sheds light on the current Palestinian divide (West Bank–Gaza), too often reduced to mere power rivalries. This confrontation is rooted in divergent categories of perception that arise from the establishment of the *Palestine of donors*. On one side are those who have internalized the "post-conflict" paradigm - linked to rentier economies and peace-through-development as promoted by international donors - and on the other, those who are excluded from it: the same social and political reality is thus perceived in radically different ways. This analytical lens reveals a foundational cleavage, fuelled by internationally promoted "solutions," that is largely absent from most analysis of Palestinian society.

Between those seeking "peace" through the normalization of injustice, and those engaged in a costly liberation process unacceptable to the international community—because it challenges the legitimacy of the Israeli state—nonviolent advocacy, while possessing legitimacy in global forums, does not articulate itself with other forms of resistance. On the contrary, it delegitimizes them by contesting both their goals and their very rationality. Since 2023, the two figures have entered a fierce confrontation, reaching the peak of their antagonism. While Thomas Friedman, writing in the *New York Times* and *Foreign Affairs* (*Jewish Studies Program, 2025; Fayyad, 2023*), celebrates the peace plan proposed by Salam Fayyad for Gaza—which would allow the PLO to lead and the PA to govern—Arabic-language writings have multiplied praising of the masked Palestinian figure, the *fida'yi*. On the ground, bullets and bombs dictate the law, continually countered by a consciousness and willpower thirsting for freedom.

This analysis extends beyond the Palestinian case; it may be compared to any context in which mechanisms of domination are obscured by grand values and principles designed to legitimize an order founded on violence and injustice. The internalization of this order by the dominated often leads them to become complicit in their own subjugation—to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu—or to the formation of a consensus around domination once it becomes hegemonic, in the Gramscian sense. Resistance to this domination remains a rational choice—even when it is built upon sacrifice.

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