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► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, Eugénie Rébillard. The Intellectual, the Militant, the Prisoner and the Partisan: the genesis of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (1974-1988). *Muslim World*, 2013, 103, pp.20. halshs-00776059

**HAL Id: halshs-00776059**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00776059>**

Submitted on 14 Jan 2013

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## *The Intellectual, the Militant, the Prisoner and the Partisan: the genesis of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (1974-1988)*

Nicolas Dot-Pouillard and Eugénie Rébillard

The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (*Ḥarakat al-Jihād al-Islāmī fī Filisṭīn, PIJ*) is known today as the second-largest Palestinian Islamic organization, following Ḥamās which was however established almost ten years later. The mediatization of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad has been driven, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the outbreak of the second Intifāda, by the large number of suicide bombers, “martyrdom operations” - ‘*amaliyyāt istishhādiyya*’ - carried out on Israeli territory, the most famous being the attack on Maxim’s in Haifa. On October 4, 2003, a young (twenty-eight-year-old) Palestinian woman, Hanādī Jarādāt, set off explosives strapped to her body. Twenty-one people were killed, and fifty-one wounded. But limiting the analysis of a movement to only one of its aspects, no doubt the most notorious one in the media, political violence, does not help resolve all the difficulties associated with it. It took a long time for Ḥamās to be discussed in terms of anything other than suicide bombers, but as a political party that employed political violence as part of its overall policy, without this eliminating all consideration of other parts of that policy.<sup>1</sup> Dividing the political landscape into “hawks” and “doves”, extremist radicals and moderate realists is an illusion. Politics is not something that can be understood in terms of false dichotomies. References to “fanaticism” often associated with Islamic groups as a sort of psychological assessment of their passionate, even demonic makeup, are in the same

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that, contrary to the Ḥamās movement, the literature on the PIJ remains rare, in English as in Arabic. Apart from the pioneering studies of the French researcher Jean-François Legrain about the PIJ during the first Intifāda and from some Arabic studies about it, both quoted in this paper, it is still possible to retain the in-depth works of Ziad Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Indiana University Press, 1994, and Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*, New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996. The study of Meir Hatina could be considered as a specific Israeli oriented view on the PIJ, but well documented. Cf. Meir Hatina, *Islam and salvation: the Islamic jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001.

situation. Calling Islamic Jihad militants fanatics is to misinterpret their policies.<sup>2</sup> While the Palestinian Islamic Jihad may be deemed “radical”, for example because of its inflexible positions with regard to the mere existence of Israel, the term loses much of its analytical dimension within the Palestinian political landscape. Oddly enough, in Palestine, Islamic Jihad may be considered a moderate group, which stood equidistant between Fataḥ and Ḥamās in the hidden civil war that has torn the two movements apart since the military takeover by Ḥamās in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Islamic Jihad has called for national unity and reconciliation among Palestinians, not stinting in its rebukes to Fataḥ or Ḥamās, and it has maintained close political ties with all the political forces within Palestine – including the left. In its own way it appears to want to represent an internal national consensus. This is a logical policy built on the party’s history and doctrine at the core of which lies the idea that there can be no true resistance against Israel without Palestinian unity. Internal moderation, the movement’s leaders would say, is the sign of effective radical action outside. The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine is thus squarely within what is called “Islamism”. From Third World type Palestinian nationalist movements of the 1970s, it has inherited not only the skill set, but the symbols, images and discourse. In this sense Islamic Jihad like Ḥizb Allāh in Lebanon, symbolizes a break and a continuity in the history of Third World nationalisms: a break, because the movement reinscribes the nationalist notion into a religious universe of meaning, partially “Islamizing” the national and Palestinian references; continuity, because Palestinian nationalism was not indifferent to religious elements at its origin, and because the islamization of nationalism does not mean that nationalism is a diluted kind, in which universal religious thematic should overdetermine endogenous patriotic and nationalist schemes. To the contrary, the great paradox of the last twenty years has been seeing Islamism, an ideology that is by all means universalist and globalizing, be perfectly well adapted to the classical paradigm of a nation-state, and to patriotic and nationalist contexts and references. The problem and the contradiction of Islamism is the same as that of left-wing Palestinian nationalism of the 1970s, and the Arab nationalisms of the 1950s and 1960s: how to ally and really hybridize a transnationalized frame of reference – the Arab nation, the Muslim community (*umma*), or even the Socialist International – with an emphasis on the defense of a nation which has to be “liberated” (the “main contradiction”, to use a Maoist term with nationalist

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<sup>2</sup> On the use of the concept of “fanaticism” in modern political thought, from Martin Luther to the attacks of 9/11/2001, see the work of the Italian philosopher Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism. On the Use of an Idea*, London, Verso, 2010.

connotations). The naming of Palestinian Islamic Jihad is in itself a political program. Each of its branches is interdependent in terms of the founding concepts of the organization, and officially describes it, linking its founding principles with elements of a religious ideology that is universal and global – Islam – and a political objective that only concerns a single national space: “Islam as the base, Jihad as the means, and the liberation of Palestine as the purpose (al-Islām ka-manṭiq, al-Jihād ka-waṣīla, wa Filisṭīn ka-hadaf li-l-tahrīr)”.<sup>3</sup> Determining the dominant component in this political triangulation could turn out to be impossible: is it the basis (*Islām*) that commands, the means (*Jihād*) or the purpose (the liberation of Palestine)? Which one of these is the summit of the triangle? Are any of them?

At any rate the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine continues to be characterized, historically, by nationalism connected to political Islam, and by the use of political violence and armed struggle as its primary means of action. It is necessary to view these two elements – nationalism and armed struggle – in a long-term historical perspective. These elements have allowed PIJ to initially organize itself as a reaction to the political quietism of the Palestinian Muslim Brothers at the end of the 1970s. Islamic Jihad is thus related to the actions of a specific political generation, something that Vietnamese sociologist Trinh Van Thao,<sup>4</sup> described as nothing more than a “génération de conjoncture”. This convergence was shaped at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s by a variety of trends or conjunctures: Arab nationalist utopias in the Middle East were losing steam, after the failure of the Nasserist and Baathist versions, disenchantment with the ideas of the left was looming – Maoism, which might have flourished in the Arab world, was already receding in China – while the Soviet Union was preparing to invade Afghanistan, in the guise of a new “socialist imperialism”. Thus 1979 in retrospect appears as the year of a “symbolic break”<sup>5</sup> in the imagination of militants. Belief in certain ideals – a socialist revolution in the Middle East, the unity of the Arab Nation – began to crumble. From the concept of revolution, or national liberation, they keep the previous imagery, associated this time with a quite different order of symbolic discourse: religion and Islam are called in to reinforce revolutionary and Third

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<sup>3</sup> For a synthetic summary of the positions taken by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, see Muḥsin Ṣalāḥ, *Dirāsāt manḥajīyya fī-l-qaḍīyya al-filisṭīniyya (Instructive studies on the Palestinian question)*, al-Faṣl al-Sadis, (chapter 6) *Munazzamat wa ḥarakat al-Tahrīr al-filisṭīniyya (Palestinian organizations and liberation movements)*, Beirut, Markaz al-‘Ilam al-‘arabi, 2003, p. 48. Available online: <http://www.alzaytouna.net/arabic/?c=137&a=38318>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Trinh Van Thao, *Les compagnons de route de Ho Chi Min. Histoire d’un engagement intellectuel au Vietnam*, Paris, Editions Karthala, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Rancjere, « Le 11 septembre et après : une rupture dans l’ordre symbolique ? », in *Moments politiques. Interventions 1977-2009*, Paris, Editions La Fabrique, 2009, p. 112-122.

World symbolism. This generation was also affected by the disintegration of secular utopias exemplified by the end of the relationship between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Lebanese left wing as the PLO left Beirut in September 1982. Concerning Palestinian Islamic Movements, it was mainly shaped by the Iranian revolution which picked up the baton. In its own manner this event breathed life into the anti-imperialist discourse on the Middle East, changing some of the ideological terminology. The Iranian revolution inspired a double passage and a double evolution: that of the young Islamists who were close to the Muslim Brotherhood, who would after this consistently oppose the until then dominant quietist approach of the Brothers; that also of some of the nationalist or even leftist Palestinian cadres who would move toward political Islam. In the evolution of a generation, several figure-types would emerge, expressing the development of the members of Islamic Jihad: the Intellectual, the Militant, the Prisoner and the Partisan.<sup>6</sup> They can help us draw an “ideal-type” of Islamist activist; in addition, they are still relevant, and they could now easily be applied to the figure of the “partisans” of Ḥizb Allāh and Ḥamās. Political violence seems to be a cardinal point of this “ideal-type”: yet, this is not totally a new element, since armed struggle is constitutive of Palestinian nationalism by the late 1960s. Again, nationalist political Islam symbolized by PIJ is deeply rooted in a long historical wave opened by the decolonization processes of the fifties and the sixties: this type of political Islam does not appear as a total break in the political discourse, previously incarnated by leftist ideologies or Arab nationalism, but as a singular theoretical and practical recombination effected inside third-worldist schemes. The figure of the PIJ activist can therefore enable us to understand how this political Islam emerged in a transnational way at the crossroads of the late 70s and the early 80s, in Palestine and in south Lebanon – with the birth of the Lebanese “Islamic resistance” – and how this transnational Islamism is a hybrid and mixed object: like the Lebanese Ḥizb Allāh, the PIJ tried to write its own history on a confluence of nationalistic aspirations – the “national liberation” – and of an Islamic “transnational romance”<sup>7</sup> bound with the “anti-imperialist” tone of the Iranian revolution.

### **Goodbye to the Brothers: Birth of the Militant as Intellectual**

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<sup>6</sup> We employ here the concept of Partisan as used by Carl Schmitt, to indicate an illegal and irregular combatant. See Carl Schmitt, *La notion de politique/ Théorie du partisan*, Paris, Flammarion, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> See Justin Jackson, « Kissinger’s Kidnapper : Eqbal Ahmad, the US New left, and the Transnational romance of revolutionary war », *Journal for the study of radicalism*, Volume 4, number 1, Michigan State University Press, 2010.

The core of what would eventually become the Islamic Jihad Movement was formed in the 1970s. Before becoming a fully pledged political movement, the Jihad first emerged in the minds of young Palestinians who had gone to study in Egypt. Their reflection revolved around issues of political engagement and Islam, and how to conciliate these two elements. They did not feel, or no longer felt, represented by the Palestinian Islamist movement, itself represented for the most part by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose primary concern was the re-Islamization of Palestinian society; nationalist and leftist organizations did not appeal to them either. The vast majority of these students were originally from the Gaza Strip, amongst them Fathī al-Shiqāqī, a medical student at the University of al-Zaqāziq, who was to become secretary-general of the PIJM until his assassination in 1995, and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uda.

Originating from the village of Zarnūqa near Jaffa, Fathī al-Shiqāqī was born in 1951, to a poor family of refugees from the Rafah refugee camp in the southern portion of the Gaza Strip. During his teenage years, he joined the branch of the Muslim Brotherhood led by Aḥmad Yāsīn before leaving for al-Zaqāziq, in the Egyptian Delta, in 1974, on a scholarship to study medicine.



*Figure 1. Fathī al-Shiqāqī, former secretary-general of PIJM (© PIJ's website)*

For his part, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uda, who never belonged to the Brotherhood, and also originally from the Gaza Strip and the Jabāliyya refugee camp, studied the Arabic language and religious sciences at Dār al-‘Ulūm in Cairo. He is still considered as the spiritual guide of the movement. In an interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ* newspaper in March 1995, only a few months before he was assassinated by Israeli secret service agents, Fathī al-Shiqāqī recalled how his movement had emerged: “the idea of Islamic Jihad matured while we were students in Egypt (...) We were young, religious, and cultivated, with roots and rich cultural and political experiences. At our evening get-togethers and in discussing things, we found that most of us had read Shakespeare, Dostoïevsky, Sartre, Eliot...Nagīb Maḥfūz, Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb and Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr. Just as we had also read Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Ḥasan al-Bannā, Baqir al-Ṣadr, Sayyid Quṭb and many works in religious sciences, works of historical knowledge... I remember writing a critique of Sartre at seventeen, as well as

articles about Lenin on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth when I was nineteen”.<sup>8</sup> If al-Shīqāqī admits that the core group of Islamic Jihad included religious clerics, he also stated that contemporary political Islam was to be seen in sociological terms as the product of a certain modernity. Within the PIJ, the young intellectual remained a central figure: “far from coming out of the clerical or traditionalist tendencies, Islamist militants came from modernist enclaves of society – faculties of education, science faculties, urban background. Furthermore [...] Islamists refer more to Islamist ideology than to religion, strictly speaking; their problem is to produce a political model out of Islam that can compete with the great ideologies of the West”.<sup>9</sup> Within such a framework, the creation of Islamic Jihad was thus originally a project of distancing carried out by young educated people who were critical of a sort of doctrinal conformism associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Palestine.

In the Gaza Strip, the most prominent associations were in the late 1970s headed by individuals who considered themselves linked to the ideological heritage of the Muslim Brotherhood. Amongst these, *al-Mujamma‘ al-Islāmī*, an association founded in 1973 by Shaykh Aḥmad Yāsīn, was known for its religious preaching, education, instruction, culture, sports, social activities, medical care, programs for the care of orphans (*kafālat al-yatīm*) and for poor families (*kafālat al-usrat al-faqīra*).<sup>10</sup> Preaching, education and struggling against those considered to be infidels, first and foremost the left in Palestine, were the main lines of the re-Islamization of Palestinian society. Taysīr al-Khaṭīb, one of the founders of Islamic Jihad and a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, had established a close relationship with Aḥmad Yāsīn. Speaking of his time as a Muslim Brother, he recalled that “Aḥmad Yāsīn had written a book on Palestinian labor in Israel intended to be distributed to the population. He stated that some of the workers, because of the cultural gap between the Gaza Strip and social life in Israel, were influenced by certain modes of living, especially by alcohol and things like that. I remember that Aḥmad Yāsīn told me that I should write a book about the illicit nature of alcohol”.<sup>11</sup> This example illustrated for al-Khaṭīb how much the Brothers were actually interested in fighting behaviors seen as deviant, illicit, and

<sup>8</sup> “Interview with Fathī Al-Shīqāqī, *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*”, London, March 18 1995, in *Fathī al-Shīqāqī, Riḥlat al-dam alladhī hazama al-sayf, al-a‘mal al-kamīla li-l-ḍuktur Fathī al-Shīqāqī, i‘dād wa tawḥīq Sayyid Rif‘at Aḥmad*, (*The complete Works of Fathī al-Shīqāqī*), Cairo, Markaz Yafā li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Abḥath, 1997, vol. 2. , p. 1139-1140.

<sup>9</sup> Olivier Roy, *L’Afghanistan. Islam et modernité politique*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, mai 1985, p 15.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-François Legrain, « Les islamistes palestiniens, a l’épreuve du soulèvement », in *Maghreb-Mashrek*, La documentation française, n°121, juillet/août 1988, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Taysīr al-Khaṭīb, Beirut, May 2010.



damaging to society. However, some young Palestinian Muslims quickly began to formulate a series of critiques directed at the Brothers, not in political terms, but in social and cultural terms. Al-Khaṭīb recalled: “because of our social status, our family education, we were very religious but we were at the same time attracted by the ideas of our times. We wanted to preserve our religiousness, but not to be cut off from modern or revolutionary ideas. There was no harm to us in reading books, for example about a materialist and historical interpretation of Islamic history, or to read authors accused of being atheists, like the Egyptian philosopher ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (...) To go to the movies was considered something close to blasphemy. We went to see movies, and we went to the theatre, but at that time we were afraid that this would become known, even though we were members of the Brotherhood organization and active in it. We wanted to be religious and open to what was happening in our times, but at the same time we wanted to read and debate, and criticize”.<sup>12</sup>

That which would become Islamic Jihad at the beginning of the 1980s thus did not start out as a political tendency; it was rather an intellectual sensibility building on criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood’s incapacity to open up to new ideas. Sociologically this group appeared for the most part as young, and educated. Apart from Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uda, who had studied religious sciences at Dār al-‘Ulūm, the majority of them were not aiming at becoming religious clerics; they studied liberal professions, for careers in government service or business. Among the prominent figures of PIJ, Faṭḥī al-Shiqaqī, Nāfidh ‘Azzām and Muḥammad al-Hindī were medical students, Muḥammad Murū studied pharmacy, Nawfal al-Wādiyya and Khaḍir Ḥabīb studied business, Taysīr al-Ghuṭī studied agronomy, and Ramaḍān Shallaḥ economics... Others, less numerous to be sure, studied human sciences or literature, most of these intending to go into teaching: Taysīr al-Khaṭīb and Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uda studied Arabic language, and then taught it; ‘Abdallāh al-Shāmī did the same with history. New horizons were opened beyond university education through a variety of activities aiming at building an “educated and aware” generation. From Sayyid Quṭb to Dostoïevsky, knowledge was encouraged, not without creating tensions between religious and secular approaches. Interestingly, many of the few religious clerics that had participated in the establishment of the PIJ have left the movement during the 1990s. Still today, in sociological terms, the leadership of Islamic Jihad, especially within its Political Bureau, is

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Taysīr al-Khaṭīb, Beirut, May 2010.

mostly composed of secular-educated intellectuals. Such phenomenon is far from limited to Islamic Jihad as a parallel movement could be spotted within Egyptian militant groups and even so to say the Muslim Brotherhood: Ḥasan al-Bannā, founder of the organization, being a teacher rather than a shaykh.

Criticism over the lack of openness of the Muslim Brothers in Palestine also implied a political break. Such a break was only gradual and focused on what was described as the “Palestinian question”. For Anwar Abū Ṭaha, member of the Jihad Political Buro, “the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and throughout Palestine, did not threaten the Israeli occupation with Jihad, and left resistance and the armed struggle to nationalist movements. This caused us to ask questions, involving those who were members of the Brotherhood. These questions were raised as a result of the Brotherhood’s position concerning resistance against the Zionist movement, within Palestine. The Brothers condemned Zionism because of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt at the time, when the imam Ḥasan al-Bannā sent militants to fight the Zionist colonists who were coming to Palestine. But the Muslim Brotherhood movement laid aside the idea of armed struggle against the Zionist project. That was what started our debate, criticism against the position of the Muslim Brotherhood”.<sup>13</sup> On the limits of the Palestinian struggle at the end of the 1970s, Fathī al-Shiqāqī made a similar observation, claiming that it was built around “Nationalists without Islam and Islamists without Palestine”.<sup>14</sup> That which had begun as an intellectual dialogue and cultural critique was transformed little by little into political criticism.

The first core group was formed in 1975-76. At that time the movement had no name, but had been called the “Islamic Avant-Gardes” (*al-ṭalāʾiʿ al-islāmiyya*). They called themselves “the generation of revolution and conscience” (*jīl al-thawra wa-l-waʿī*) but were then facing a dilemma as they wondered if they should stay within the framework established by the Muslim Brothers, or leave it. Debate was harsh but the arrival of new members, who did not belong to the Brotherhood, convinced the members of the necessity to create their own organization. As a result, two groups formed the parentage of the Islamic Jihad Movement, one group having stood off from the Muslim Brotherhood, very critical of them, and another coming from outside made up of students with different Palestinian political tendencies, such as Khaḍīr Ḥabīb, a former member of Fataḥ, or independents such as Ramaḍān Shallāḥ,

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Anwar Abū Ṭaha, Damascus, May 2010.

<sup>14</sup> *Fathī al-Shiqāqī, Riḥlat al-dam*, vol. 2, p. 1139-1141.

the current secretary-general of the organization. In a long interview concerned with his personal experiences, Ramaḍān Shallāḥ spoke of being attracted to the left during the 1970s, though he never joined a group. He thought that religion did not have as high a place as it ought on the left wing.<sup>15</sup>

The Iranian Revolution caused the break with the Muslim Brotherhood to become permanent. In 1979, at the age of twenty-eight, Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī published a remarkable political manifesto in Cairo: *Khumaynī: al-Ḥall al-Islāmī wa-l-Badīl* (*Khomeyni: the Islamic solution and the alternative*).<sup>16</sup> This work, barely a hundred pages, is clearly designated as an appeal to follow the lead of revolutionary Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini. It was also a detailed critique of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Palestine, who were said to be absent from Palestine's national struggle. Two days after the publication of the book the Egyptian secret services arrested Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī at his home and held him for several days. He was released, and the book was printed again, but that cost Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī four months in prison. Azzam Tamimi recalls that Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī was “kicked out of the Muslim Brotherhood while he was a student in Cairo in 1979, officially because he published a pamphlet titled *Khumaynī: al-Ḥall al-Islāmī wa-l-Badīl*, which was something the Brotherhood had ordered him not to do. It appears possible that this expulsion from the Brothers had more to do with his charge that the Brothers had no strategy as regards the armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine, than his pro-Khomeini book, strictly speaking. The official position of the Brotherhood at the time did not emphasize the Palestinian question over other Islamic questions”.<sup>17</sup> Taysīr al-Khaṭīb recalled that “the student organization of the Palestinian Muslim Brothers in Egypt has supported the Iranian Revolution, with some reservations, because they were in contact with certain Palestinian ulemas based in Jordan or in Saudi Arabia. They said that the revolution is a good thing, but Iranians are still Shi'ites, and they are Sunnis, and they have the actual Islam. When Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī wrote the book and published it, the Muslim Brothers felt that he had gone too far, that he should have submitted the book so they could decide if it should be published, or not. The Brothers decided to suspend Faṭḥī's membership”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Fī 'ayn al-'aṣifa* (*In the Eye of the Storm*), interview with Ramaḍān Shallāḥ, secretary-general of Islamic Jihad, with Ghassān Sharbal, journalist for al-Ḥayat, Beirut, Edition Bisān, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī, *Khumaynī*, Cairo, al-Mukhtār al-Islāmī, 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas. A history from within*, New York, Olive Branch Press, 2007, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Taysīr al-Khaṭīb, Beirut, May 2010.



Figure 2. Ramaḍān Shallāḥ, secretary-general of PIJM (© PIJ's website)

Simply put, Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī had appeared to have operated a double political break. The PIJ stood between revolutionary but secular nationalism in the manner of the PLO, which Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī critiqued but did not reject, and the Muslim quietism of the Palestinian Brothers, to whom Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī belonged ideologically but whom he rejected on political and practical grounds. The PIJ then believed a third way was possible: that of a Palestinian political Islam that was both nationalist and Jihadist. It is a kind of dialectical synthesis of for and against: against the secular nationalism of the PLO, against political Islam separated from the nationalist struggle; for a patriotic Islam (*waṭānī*) that is also revolutionary (*thawrī*), once the critique of the PLO and the Muslim Brotherhood has been carried out. The work was published by al-Ḥajj Ibn ‘Ashūr under a pseudonym, Faṭḥī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. “Back then (February 1979), I recall that we had asked Faṭḥī to explain the basis of Khomeini’s movement to us, and its aims, because we didn’t really know what was going on. At first he thought that he would just write a paper, about ten pages, for us to read. But the idea expanded until he decided to write a short book and get it published and distributed. I remember that he went to Cairo and bought reference works about Shi’ism and Khomeini’s movement at bookstores. He wrote the book, sent it to Tehran, and it went on sale in the middle of February 1979”.<sup>19</sup> The book was dedicated to “the greatest men of the century, the martyred imām Ḥasan al-Bannā and the revolutionary imām, the Ayatollah al-Khomeyni”.

From this point on, the Muslim Brotherhood took exceptional steps against the book and decided to suspend al-Shiqāqī’s activities in the organization. The break with the Brothers was total, ideological and political. Once released from jail in late 1979, al-Shiqāqī became

<sup>19</sup> *Fī ‘ayn al-‘aṣifa*, p. 76.

involved in political activities. The Avant-Gardes would leave Egypt and go to Gaza in the summer of 1980. Shortly prior to that some of al-Shīqāqī's friends had already returned to Gaza; others had gone to Gulf States for jobs. At this point Fathī al-Shīqāqī and his closest friends were able to develop ideas of “revolutionary Islam” on the ground. They were active around universities, and recruited a fair number of partisans. They decided to create an Islamic student movement, and stood for election on a list titled “Independent Islamist students’ Bloc” at the University of Gaza. According to official sources within the movement, that list got 16.5 % of the vote in student union elections at the beginning of the 1981-1982 school year, while a list that represented Fataḥ and the left got 22%. This ballot symbolised how much the Islamic Jihad did not just perceive itself as a small group of “enlightened” militants, but would try to sway a larger public. The youth of Gaza was its natural target, in social terms. Islamic Jihad recruited partisans and sympathizers for union and political work, and to publish magazines. Competition with the Muslim Brothers of Shaykh Aḥmad Yāsīn, especially in the mosques of Gaza, became sharper. To get rid of them, the Brothers did not hesitate to accuse them of tilting toward Shi’ism.

To speak as they did of revolutionary Islamism with an “anti-colonial” aspect implied that these young militants, many of whom had recently separated from the Muslim Brotherhood, were ready to take part in armed struggle against Israel. The young critic and intellectual Fathī al-Shīqāqī had quickly become an experienced militant. He was an “organic intellectual” in Gramscian terms, or, more exactly, an “Intellectual-Militant”.<sup>20</sup> This figure, according to the French philosopher Daniel Bensaïd, is different from “engaged intellectuals”, and refuses “any epistemological break that would establish a division of the terrain between theory (where the intellectual exercises his critical freedom) and politics (in which the party would stand as a competent authority)”.<sup>21</sup> This intellectual partisanship now had a practical representative, once Islamic Jihad relocated to the Gaza Strip. The passage into practical politics was certain to bring with it some punishment, which would eventually appear as the very condition of the political deployment of the movement: the passage through prison.

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<sup>20</sup> On the distinction between engagement and militance, “the engaged intellectual” and the “militant intellectual”, see Daniel Bensaïd, “Quand l’histoire nous désenchante. Entretien avec Gilbert Wasserman”, *Revue Mouvements*, number 44, Paris, Editions La Découverte, March 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, “Paul Nizan : clercs et chiens de garde”, in *Clercs ou chiens de garde : les intellectuels et l’engagement*, revue *Contretemps* number 15, Paris, Editions Textuel, 2005.

## The Experience of Prison: the Figure of the Prisoner.

The long history of armed and clandestine movements for “national liberation” has in various instances proved how the experience of prison can be productive. Indeed, incarceration can foster radicalization. However, such analysis falls short of understanding that prison is itself often the product of radicality. It is seldom highlighted that prison can also be productive because through incarceration militants organize, think and often write. Prisons then become a “strategic place”<sup>22</sup> where people can be trained and meet, where recruits, or converts are found. Many PIJ militants were indeed recruited in prison; the proof is visible in the nationalist or leftist militants that Islamic Jihad recruited in Israeli prisons. Prisons are finally a place for political training in which theoretical and strategic issues are addressed. For the PIJ, prison was a place where militants learned to be militants, just the opposite from what the Israelis had wanted. It produced a qualitative leap in the professionalization of the movement.

Gradually in the early 1980s, the relocation of Jihad cells throughout the Occupied Territories started to worry the Israeli authorities. The PIJ magazine *al-Ṭālī‘at al-Islāmiyya*, *The Islamic Vanguard*, had a growing circulation in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. In August and September 1983, the Israelis decided to take action and arrested hundreds: al-Shiqāqī was amongst them, staying in prison for eleven months, accused of having founded the Islamic Jihad organization, of publishing *al-Ṭālī‘a*, and of calling for an uprising against the Israelis. Taysīr al-Ghuṭī was jailed for four months in the central prison of Gaza for having distributed the magazine,<sup>23</sup> along with twenty other militants. Interrogations went on for five months. The Israeli authorities were taking the matter very seriously.

That same year, 1983, the Israelis put Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uda and Ramaḍān Shallāḥ under house arrest, accusing them of belonging to Islamic Jihad.<sup>24</sup> ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Uda and

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<sup>22</sup> Prison as a strategic space is a classic situation for secret movements or armed movements, especially when it is a matter of nationalism. One of the most familiar examples is the Irish Republican Army (IRA). See Tiphaine Granger, “An IRA strategy: the struggle in prison. (1971-1981)”, in *Vingtème siècle. Revue d’histoire*, number 70, Paris, Presses de Science-Po, April-June 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Taysīr al-Ghuṭī, in *Ṣawt al-Jihād al-Islāmī* (*The voice of the Islamic Jihad*), internal magazine for Islamic Jihad, number 11, January 2008, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> *Masīrat al-Jihād*, (*The development of the Islamic Jihad Movement*), Publications of Islamic Jihad, no publication information, p. 17.

Ramaḍān Shallaḥ were forbidden to set foot in the Islamic University of Gaza, or to teach there, a move that the administration of the school, controlled by Muslim Brothers, did not object to.<sup>25</sup>

The experience of prison allowed the members of Islamic Jihad to recruit many militants who originally belonged to other organizations or political tendencies. The idea of an Islamic movement fighting against the occupier spawned imitators among the political prisoners. The current vice-secretary of the organization, Ziyād al-Nakhāla, was one of the first so recruited in the early 1980s: “the first contacts with Fathī al-Shiqāqī and the others took place toward the end of 1982. In prison, we formed a clandestine cell. I was arrested while I was part of the Popular Liberation Forces<sup>26</sup> in the Gaza Strip. In prison the atmosphere for the members of my organization was rather religious and traditional. I became more and more religious myself. That religious practice led me to join PIJ, which was not called that then, even though all the tendencies were represented in the prison (Fataḥ), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine ...). There were also various Islamist groups, but it was mainly a matter of individuals who had left other organizations. There was an Islamist tendency that grew steadily within the prisons, and this growth was sustained, and the influence continued outside the prisons. Once we were released, some of us joined Jihad, others Ḥamās...”<sup>27</sup> Ziyād al-Nakhāla got out of prison in 1985: his political life after that was joined with that of Islamic Jihad. Other Jihad members who would be regarded as “heroes” in the armed struggles were also recruited in prison, including former members of the Popular Liberation Forces: Aḥmad Mhanna and Miṣbah al-Ṣūrī. Two other members were former members of the Palestinian Marxist left, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP): ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mināwī and Muḥammad Jamal. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mināwī, military chief of the PFLP, was imprisoned by the Israelis during the 1970s. Al-Mināwī did not define himself as a complete Marxist at that time. Like al-Nakhāla, he became more and

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<sup>25</sup> *Al-Ṭalī‘a*, number 19, August 1984, p.12, cited in Anwar Abū Ṭaha, (member of the politburo of Islamic Jihad), *Ḥarakat al-Jihād al-Islamī : al-uṣūl, al-aydyūlūjiyya wa-l-taḥawwulāt*, (*The Islamic Jihad Movement: origins, ideology and development*), Advanced studies diploma program, University of Damascus, 1998-1999, p. 89.

<sup>26</sup> Beginning with the 1956 war, Nasser trained thousands of young Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, then under Egyptian administration, so they could join the Palestine Liberation Army, the military wing of the PLO. After the 1967 war the fedayeen movement took control of the PLO. The officers of that army thus stayed in Gaza under Israeli occupation, and formed a paramilitary group to fight against the occupation during the 1970s and 1980s, known as the *quwwat al-tahrīr al-sha‘biyya*, “Popular Liberation Forces” (PLF).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ziyād al-Nakhāla, vice-secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, August 2010, Damascus.

more involved with his religion.<sup>28</sup> Thus the experience of prison exposed Islamic Jihad to other militant initiatives that could be joined to it. It is important to note that now experienced fighters from Fataḥ, the Popular Front or the Popular Liberation Forces, joined the youth of Islamic Jihad in rallying around certain ideas. Such new blood added an amount of military experience and credibility that the young intellectuals who founded Islamic Jihad did not have in the beginning.

### **Stories of “Irregulars”: the Figure of the Partisan**

During the early 1980s several small Palestinian Islamist groups supported an armed struggle against the Israelis, and called themselves “Jihad” in some form. “Jihad” at that moment did not designate a single organization, but a tendency or a kind of coalition, within which there were three main groups: the group led by Fathī al-Shiqaqī; the Islamic Jihad Brigades (*Sarāyā al-Jihād al-Islāmī*, often cited as SAJA) led by Munir Shafiq, Muḥammad Bḥayṣ and Bassam Sulṭān al-Tamīmī, Palestinian veterans of the war in Lebanon, and finally the partisans, most from the West Bank, of Shaykh As‘ad al-Tamīmī. First contacts between the different groups began in 1982. This implies that what is labeled “Jihad” today did not come into being like a party. In the beginning it was more of a network, which turned into a party because of shared support for an armed struggle. That struggle would play a large role in the publication of magazines and political tracts. The first (military) operation recorded as having been the responsibility of the “Jihad” group of Fathī al-Shiqaqī took place on June 8, 1984, in the Gaza Strip: Abū Ḥaṣīra and Muḥammad al-‘Abd al-Ḥasanī threw a grenade at some Israeli troops. On February 18, 1986, a cell from the al-Shiqaqī group organized a grenade attack in which eleven Israeli soldiers were wounded. These operations led the Israelis to conduct another series of arrests.

The means used were of course far from equal to Israeli arms, and at first they were not even at the level of a classic guerilla movement. Militants had difficulties even getting hold of weapons in the West Bank and Gaza. The period from 1984 to 1987 saw many attacks carried out with small arms. A “war with knives” was launched against the Israeli military in the West Bank and Gaza, particularly in the latter where almost all the military operations

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Minawī, August 2010, Damascus.



took place. Only after 1986 did the use of firearms become widespread, as the military expertise of the PIJ militants improved.

Israeli waves of repression against the “Jihad” movement in all its forms followed each operation. At the end of 1983 the Israeli Army arrested seven Palestinians from the West Bank who went to trial in Nablus in June 1984, after six months of detention.<sup>29</sup> These men had got themselves noticed through attacks in the West Bank, in Jerusalem, and especially in an attack on an Israeli settler in Hebron. They did not belong to al-Shiqaqī’s group, but the contact between them and al-Shiqaqī’s faction, according to Ibrāhīm Sarbal, one of the main leader of the cells dismantled at the end of 1983, seems to have been set up in June 1983. Prison continued to be a path to recruitment. Imprisoned Jihad militants distilled their thoughts in a slim volume called “The Road to Paradise” (*al-Ṭarīq ilā-l-janna*) that was to be advertised in the PIJ magazine.<sup>30</sup> For some of the militants of Islamic Jihad, Israeli repression targeting religious groups and an increasing number of armed attacks were the sign of a historical shift, marking the rise of the Islamic jihadist movement, and a crisis for the much older PLO: “Day after day there were more signs of the move toward Islam on the Palestinian scene. The events of these last years, particularly the battle of Beirut,<sup>31</sup> showed that the Palestinian nationalist movement had reached an impasse”.<sup>32</sup> Islamic Jihad was from this point on becoming an important actor within the Palestinian political field, competing for influence on two fronts: on one side, competing with the Muslim Brotherhood, on the other with secular nationalist movements.

On October 15, 1986, the Israeli army was hit by a large scale operation; this was the operation of the Gate of the Maghrebans in Jerusalem, carried out by the members of *Sarāyā al-Jihād al-Islāmī*, which wounded sixty Israeli soldiers. The three members of SAJA, Ṭarīq al-Halis, ‘Abd al-Nāṣir al-Halis and Ibrāhīm Ḥasan ‘Alyān, were killed during the operation. While a number of PIJ leaders sometimes claim credit for this military strike, it appears that the operation was in fact carried out by the Brigades of the Islamic Jihad, a distinct group. If the obscurity over this point remained, it was mainly because the Brigades had within their

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<sup>29</sup> *Al-Ṭalī‘a*, number 18, June 1984, p. 2. From the personal collection of Jean-François Legrain.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Ṭalī‘a*, number 18, June 1984, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> The Islamic Jihad magazine here refers to the Palestinians leaving Beirut in September 1982, after a long siege by the Israelis. The PLO’s departure from Beirut should be placed in relation to the turning point represented by the Iranian Revolution in 1979. These two events were signs of the beginning of the end of the PLO period, which had been characterized by a certain dominance of the left wing in political discussion, by the alliance with the Lebanese left, and the practice of a socialist-sounding discourse by all the factions of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

<sup>32</sup> *Al-Ṭalī‘a*, number 18, June 1984, p. 2.

ranks two kinds of activists and militants. The SAJA was in fact at the confluence of two movements: its main leaders (Munir Shafiq, Bassam Sulṭān al-Tamimi, Muḥammad Bḥayṣ, Marwān al-Kayālī) were members, intellectuals or officers, of Fataḥ, and saw themselves in continuity with the Maoist-tending Student Brigade of Fataḥ, begun in the 1970s but which evolved towards Islamo-nationalism in part because of the momentum of the Iranian revolution;<sup>33</sup> however some of its core militants did not belong to Fataḥ, and just claimed adherence to a wider Jihad tendency, then finding in SAJA the military complement that they wanted in the Occupied Territories. The SAJA was thus not the equivalent of a political party, or an official military branch, strictly speaking, in the manner of ETA in the Basque country or the Provisional IRA. SAJA then emerged as a political and military tendency, where the members of Fataḥ and individuals within the broader Jihad tendency could meet.

Concerning the founding of the SAJA, stories differ. In an interview given in 1990 to a Lebanese newspaper, al-Shiqaqi spoke of the origin of the Brigades: “The SAJA is not an organization on its own, but a name which our group and other brothers agreed would be the signature of our military operations in common”.<sup>34</sup> This statement appears to make SAJA the result of cooperation between two different groups, that of al-Shiqaqi, and that of Munir Shafiq, still a member of Fataḥ, but having taken up political Islam. But SAJA as a tendency actually existed well before an agreement with the al-Shiqaqi group, because it was a direct offshoot of the Maoist Student Brigade of Fataḥ.<sup>35</sup> Thus SAJA turned out to be the result of a strategic reflection on the part of officers and intellectuals from Fataḥ, who were from this point fascinated by the Iranian revolution. They allegedly wanted to unite all the Palestinian forces that were proclaiming jihad, and put the emphasis on military operations in the Occupied Territories: “the idea of SAJA was to organize all the fighting Islamist groups in the Palestinian territories; some of them were Muslim Brothers, others were already with Fathī al-Shiqaqi and the Jihad of the Gaza Strip, and there were small Salafist groups ready

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<sup>33</sup> Concerning the history of the Student Brigade of Fataḥ in Lebanon, and the passage by leftist militants to political Islam, Cf. Nicolas Dot-Pouillard, *De Pékin à Téhéran, en passant par Jérusalem. La singulière conversion à l'islamisme des « Maos du Fatah »*, Cahiers de l'Institut Religioscope, number 2, Geneva, Institut Religioscope, December, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Fathī al-Shiqaqi, in *al-Liwa'*, October 3, 1990, in Fathī al-Shiqaqi *The complete Works*, ibid., vol. 2, p. 733.

<sup>35</sup> On the history and the accomplishments of the founding leaders of the Brigades of Islamic Jihad, all former members of the Fatah left and the Student Brigades, it is necessary to consult the work devoted to them by the founder of the Student Brigade, Munir Shafiq. See Munir Shafiq, *Shuhada' wa Masira. Abū Ḥasan wa Ḥamdī wa Ikhwanuhuma*, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Wafa', 1994.

to go to war, and also people from the Islamist tendency inside Fataḥ”.<sup>36</sup> The agreement between the Faṭḥī al-Shīqāqī’s group and the group of Munīr Shafīq was thus apparently based on a shared observation that it was necessary to have an armed force, and that was supposed to give rise to a political structure. Like al-Shīqāqī, Munīr Shafīq thought that the struggle against the Israeli occupier was the top priority for the Islamist movement, and not the Islamization of society, which by then remained the goal of the Muslim Brothers. The armed operations of SAJA were directed from Amman, Jordan, by Sulṭān al-Tamīmī (Ḥamḍī), Muḥammad Bḥayṣ (Abū Ḥasan) and Marwān al-Kayālī. The number two of Fataḥ and the PLO, Abū Jihād, worked with them.

The Brigades of the Islamic Jihad also recruited and trained women, one of whom was famous for having spent more than seventeen years in Israeli prisons, ‘Iṭāf ‘Alyān: “I was a member of the Brigades of the Islamic Jihad when I was seventeen. I was born in 1962 in the occupied territories, and in 1980 I went to Lebanon secretly to get military training. I was actually trained in the Fataḥ camps. Ḥamḍī Sulṭān al-Tamīmī and Munīr Shafīq founded the Brigades of Islamic Jihad, and the idea of the movement back then was to go with Islam, and struggle in a military sense against the Israeli occupation. Once my military training was completed I went back to Palestine, and after 1984 I asked the leadership of the Brigades to carry out an operation”.<sup>37</sup>

During 1987 the group led by Faṭḥī al-Shīqāqī carried out a number of spectacular operations. This was still a few months before the beginning of the first Palestinian Intifaḍa. On July 5, six members of al-Faṭḥī al-Shīqāqī’s group escaped from the central prison in Gaza: they were Miṣbah al-Ṣūrī, Muḥammad Jamal, Sāmī al-Shaykh Khalīl, ‘Imād al-Ṣaṭṭawī, Khalīd Ṣalāḥ and Ṣalāḥ Shtawī.<sup>38</sup> In October, a series of clashes occurred between Faṭḥī al-Shīqāqī’s partisans and the Israeli Army. On October 6 a commando unit took on the Israeli Army in the Shujā’iyya quarter in the northeastern part of Gaza; this encounter was later known as “the battle of Shujā’iyya”. The members of the unit, a leader of the military information service and ten Israeli soldiers were killed in these combats. Also in October, the first leaflet to appear under the name of Islamic Jihad was published: it was the

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Abū Ḥadīd, former member of the Brigades of Islamic Jihad, Beirut, September 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with ‘Iṭāf ‘Alyān, published on the informational website, *Watanvoice*, <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/content/print/65.html>

<sup>38</sup> Undated leaflet by Islamic Jihad, from the personal collection of Jean-François Legrain. Our thanks go to Jean-François Legrain for permission to consult his personal collection including this document, which he collected in the Gaza Strip during the first Intifaḍa.

announcement of its founding, which Jihad sources say took place on October 9.<sup>39</sup> The organization was not yet an actual political party, but it was no longer a mere tendency. October 1987 saw the group take a step towards independence; it was still a movement in between stages, between a network based on an ideological affinity (and on the acceptance of armed struggle) and a publicly organized political party.

Islamic Jihad, in its history and its imagery, gives an account of an Intifāḍa that had been prepared over a long period of time and foreshadowed in a series of armed engagements between Islamic Jihad militants and the Israeli Army in the Gaza Strip. On another hand, it's interesting to note that Ḥamās and the PLO subscribe to the same version of events, although disagreeing on the exact date of the beginning of the uprising. Ḥamās gives December 9, 1987, as the date of the beginning of the Intifāḍa, while Islamic Jihad considers that it had already begun in October. Throughout the month of December Islamic Jihad published communiqués calling for a general strike and for the continuation of the uprising; both appeals received wide support among the public. By then, Islamic Jihad, due to its spectacular attacks on Israeli targets (military and settlers), had gained prominence. In parallel, the Muslim Brotherhood was developing a military response, and taking part in the uprising. On December 15 the first leaflet signed by Ḥamās that is, under the acronym of *Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamat al-Islāmiyya*, the Movement for Islamic Resistance, was published. It appeared that the quietism and inertia of the Brotherhood, so sharply criticized by Islamic Jihad founders from the late 1970s on, had become difficult to justify in the context of the Intifāḍa. One part of Islamic Jihad saw in the creation of Ḥamās a form of opportunism on the part of the Muslim Brothers, whose domination of the Islamist scene in Palestine had been threatened for some time. For some, Ḥamās had been created in order to compete with Islamic Jihad, which was becoming popular with Palestinians. According to Anwar Abū Ṭaha, a member of the politburo of Islamic Jihad, when the "critique by the Muslim Brothers took shape in a manifesto, in a program of tasks and a new organization, the Muslim Brotherhood movement was regarding Jihad, which it considered as its own offshoot, as a competing movement challenging the legitimacy of its own authority and its prestige on the Palestinian scene. This is where the tension began between Islamic Jihad and the Muslim Brotherhood, though they had not yet begun to fight against each other. The competition was fierce, intense, continuous, especially in the Gaza Strip, in the media and in the relations

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<sup>39</sup> Pamphlet by Islamic Jihad, from the personal collection of Jean-François Legrain. *Masīrat al-Jihād al-Islāmī*, *The development of Islamic Jihad*, Publications of Islamic Jihad, 1989, p. 30.

between the two organizations, up to the point where the Movement for Islamic resistance was created, Ḥamās. The competition between the Brothers and Islamic Jihad was the main cause of the creation of Ḥamās. The movement of the Muslim Brothers that created Ḥamās, they had felt that if they did not participate in the resistance and in the Jihad in Palestine, their movement would weaken”.<sup>40</sup> This is not, of course, the interpretation of Ḥamās leaders today. Nonetheless it is sure that the existence of a revolutionary Islamic tendency, competing with the Muslim Brotherhood since the late 1970s in terms of the national struggle and the armed struggle, forced the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood to admit that their organization was experiencing a decline, in terms of militants and political status, especially among increasingly radicalized young people in Gaza. Ḥamās would in its communiqués express positions that were counter to positions of the PLO and the unified general command created in January 1988 which served as an umbrella for the main Palestinian factions. But Islamic Jihad, in order to preserve unity and strengthen the dynamic of the Intifāda, did not do so. However, Islamic Jihad, contrary to rumors that appeared in the Israeli media, was not part of the unified general command that included Fataḥ, the Popular Front (PFLP), the Democratic Front (DFLP) and the Palestinian Communist Party.

On February 18, 1988, the three most visible leaders of the SAJA, Sulṭān al-Tamīmī (Ḥamdī), Muḥammad Bḥayṣ (Abū Ḥasan) and Marwān al-Kayālī were assassinated by the Israeli secret service, at Limassol in Cyprus. Islamic Jihad published a statement the same day in which it called on all Palestinians to celebrate the martyrdom of these leaders of the SAJA: “this odious crime committed by a criminal enemy outside our occupied country is added to the daily and unending crimes committed against our people in the towns, villages and refugee camps of this occupied country (...) So that tomorrow, this Friday, February 19, 1988, shall become a memorable day of the holy Intifāda, we shall go forward, men, women, children and old people, to the mosques in order to pray for the spirits of the martyrs, and we will march in symbolic funeral processions in their honor in every town and city, every village and camp of our pure land”.<sup>41</sup> Sulṭān al-Tamīmī (Ḥamdī), Muḥammad Bḥayṣ (Abū Ḥasan) and Marwān al-Kayālī symbolized in retrospect a very singular history, though one that is widespread, of leftist militants moving toward political Islam. From the war in Lebanon to the time spent with the SAJA, Sulṭān al-Tamīmī (Ḥamdī), Muḥammad Bḥayṣ

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Anwar Abū Ṭaha, Damascus, May 2010.

<sup>41</sup> *Masīrat al-Jihād al-Islāmī, The development of Islamic Jihad*, Publications of Islamic Jihad, no publication information, p. 51.

(Abū Ḥasan) and Marwān al-Kayālī were fighters who had adopted political ideologies appropriate to what they thought was the most effective path in the political struggle against Israel, a military one. The former activists of the SAJA would go in three different directions. Some would join Islamic Jihad when it became a regular political party. That was the case with ‘Iṭāf ‘Alyān. She was first released from prison in 1997. Others would stay in Fataḥ, becoming active members of the Brigades of the al-Aqsa martyrs. Marwān al-Zalūm, a former militant of the Brigades of Islamic Jihad, a member of Fataḥ, would participate directly in the establishment of the Brigades of the al-Aqsa martyrs, the main armed wing of Fataḥ during the second Intifāḍa in 2000. As for Munīr Shafīq, he would leave Fataḥ, but would refuse to join PIJ, choosing to situate itself at the confluence of two political traditions, playing the role of an intellectual intermediary between nationalism and political Islam.

With the gradual disappearance of the SAJA and the popular dynamic of the first Intifāḍa, the situation changed. The Intifāḍa being an overtly popular movement, armed struggle by an elite not only appeared to make less sense but also accomplished less that was useful in such a context. This being acknowledged, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s role during the 1980s was instrumental as it had directly helped build up the tension that eventually led to the explosion of the Intifāḍa. Armed action by the militants caused repression to increase which in its turn fostered the rise of more popular armed action. Islamic Jihad saw the Intifāḍa as the result of its own operations since 1984. The fact that the popular blow-up in 1988 happened in the Gaza Strip was largely seen by the movement’s leaders as a sign of their own success as it was there that the PIJ had concentrated its attacks against settlers and the Israeli Army. It was such armed struggle that literally had brought Islamic Jihad into existence. Its militants had emerged and strengthened through clandestine operations, because of repression and in prisons as well. The growing popularity of the PIJ and of armed struggle itself, well beyond the original circle of the movement’s militants, led to the development of the figure of the Partisan, which came to stand beside the Intellectual, the Militant, and the Prisoner. This new image of the combatant can be characterized according to Carl Schmitt by four aspects: he is “irregular” and therefore “illegal”, he is “political”, he is “mobile”. Finally he is “telluric”, that is, attached to a piece of ground, to a “land” that he knows well and is in command of. Such characteristics were evidently instrumental in popularizing the struggle of PIJ and in widening its base of support. Banu Bargu recalls:

“...according to Schmitt, four qualities constitute the Partisan: irregularity, flexible movement with the ability to shock, intense political commitment, and a strong tie to the land. The Partisan’s lack of uniform and the rank-and-file order of the conventional military institution render his actions irregular and secret while the ease of movement endows him with the ability to ambush the enemy. But it is the Partisan’s political commitment, reflected in the original meaning of his name, derived from party or political grouping that really distinguishes the Partisan from the criminal whose irregular and secretive actions strive for personal enrichment (e.g., thief or pirate). Yet the Partisan always risks criminality vis-a-vis the law, which continually transposes his irregularity into illegality. At stake are not only life and limb but also status and honor. In order to avoid ‘sink[ing] into the criminal realm’, the Partisan must have legitimacy...”.<sup>42</sup>

The Palestinian nationalism of Islamic Jihad, attached to a land without a constituted nation-state, partakes of the “telluric” character of the Partisan. Even more, this characteristic of Islamic Jihad was directly linked to its political aspect as a movement of national liberation. And mobility is not something that only had to do with secrecy and illegality. The partisans of Islamic Jihad were mobile in that many of them would leave the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Expelled from these areas by Israel, mobility became exile. The figure of the Partisan could also, in an extreme case, develop as a “sacrificial Partisan” as some of the Palestinian fighters for Islamic Jihad seemed destined for a violent end. The suicide bomber of the 1990s had not yet appeared, but it was already in the cards. The figure of the Partisan, experienced in armed struggle and political violence, did not however erase the previous figures. In exile, the irregular could become an intellectual once again. As he was in prison, he could develop new military theory. Through time, trajectories would emerge beginning with the Intellectual, passing by way of the Militant and the Prisoner, ending up with the figure of the “irregular”, the Partisan. All these figures at the end of the 1980s were superimposed one upon the other as a complete whole. They had to be so, in order for what was a tendency, a kernel, to become what it would become, a political party.

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<sup>42</sup> Banu BARGU, “Unleashing the Acheron: Sacrificial Partisanship, Sovereignty, and History”, *Theory and Event*, Volume 13, issue 1, John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

### *Islamism in counterpoint*

Why study Islamic Jihad today? It allows one to develop a different point of view on political Islam and on the issue of violence. In fact, the reading of events according to the Muslim Brotherhood and of Ḥamās too often overshadows other narratives and interpretations of the wider contemporary Islamic movement. Islamic Jihad is not dominant like Ḥamās, but it is to be reckoned with in Palestinian politics. Islamic Jihad can be placed as it were throughout this contribution in contrast or counterpoint, over against the Muslim Brothers. Militants of PIJ came from the Brothers' ranks, but they took their distance, intellectually and politically, early on fascinated as they were by the Iranian revolution. Their affinity in the present for Ḥizb Allāh in Lebanon while remaining in the Sunni realm indicates that they do not set much store by the sectarian oppositions. This break with the Muslim Brotherhood implied another break. PIJ originated from a critique of the intellectual relevance of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Palestine. It was necessary that Faṭḥī al-Shiqāqī's rejection and that of his companions crystallize into the form of a policy; an issue or "problematic" was then required, one which the Brotherhood did not control, and this was the Palestinian question that highlighted the relevance of the nationalist framework. It was also necessary that a unique historical event supervene, and this was the Iranian Revolution that brought legitimacy to the Islamo-nationalist approach and served as a model. The events in Tehran in February 1979 were grasped early on by the founders of Islamic Jihad. Nationalism implied here political engagement against Israel, and that in turn required giving the armed struggle a central and formative value. Islam pulled PIJ militants in the direction of the Brotherhood, but the mystique of armed action and a certain brand of Third World nationalism pulled them away from this movement. Edward Saïd, using a musical metaphor for some of his own technical terms, defined counterpoint as that which is opposed to homophony, a musical line consisting of one sustained note, almost a kind of atonality of movement.<sup>43</sup> PIJ could then be seen as the "atonal" and the counterpoint for an Islamic and nationalist sonata. Through being neither Salafists nor Muslim Brothers, through remaining Sunnis despite being seduced by a certain political Islam inspired by Shī'ites, by putting Islam as well as nationalism at the core of their doctrine, and through not defining themselves as preachers to the masses but as avant-garde militants, PIJ founders established a rather exceptional figure in contemporary Islamic politics. Such an exception confirms no

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Edward Saïd, "*Criticism, culture and performance*", in *Power, Politics and Culture, Interviews with Edward Saïd*, London, Bloomsbury publishing PLC, 2001.



rule. Or rather, it confirms all of them. In terms of Islamic politics, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad confirms the centrality of nationalism. In the Palestinian context, nationalism did not come to the fore immediately due to a certain resistance coming from within the Muslim Brotherhood, whose leaders would eventually be forced to play the game. Islamic Jihad in the 1980s broke the monopoly of Fatah and leftist forces, bringing them to admit that Islam was from now on a symbolic force that had to be reckoned with. The paradoxical Islamism of Islamic Jihad may have accomplished, and declared at a given moment in history, a double break in the order of symbols, both nationalist and Islamist.

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