

prison, including four years in solitary confinement, yet none of these years were wasted. He learned Hebrew and absorbed everything he could about his enemy, even devising and executing a long-term intelligence plan from behind bars, which was considered highly complex at the time.

In 2004, after an intricate operation that involved significant efforts and recruiting numerous prisoners, Sinwar, still incarcerated at the time, published his novel titled *The Thorn and the Carnation*. The novel delves into the struggles of Palestinians during the historical periods between 1967 and the Al-Aqsa Intifada in the early 2000s, highlighting the rise of Islamic movements in Palestinian resistance—particularly the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas.

The story expands to include relatives, neighbors, people from the camp, Gaza, the West Bank, and other occupied territories.

### A medium for philosophy

The novel features fictional characters, yet all its events are real; the fictional aspect stems from turning these events into a narrative that meets the conditions of a novel, as the author mentions in the introduction. The author's choice to document this critical stage in the history of armed resistance and present it creatively as a novel demonstrates that this effort goes far beyond merely recounting history and its events. It is not just a reflection of past events; it is a deep exploration of the philosophical and moral forces that shape historical movements. The characters in historical novels engage with philosophical struggles within the context of their times. In other words, it serves as a tool to understand the complex relationship between personal beliefs and the broader scope of history. Sinwar steps beyond the confines of traditional historiography to address the dramatic struggles in history, allowing him to explore their philosophical dimensions—particularly the impact of beliefs on history. This enables him to formulate a philosophy for the Islamic Resistance Movement.

### Story of a boy from a refugee camp

The story is narrated from the perspective of Ahmed, a boy from a refugee camp, who opens his eyes for the first time to a harsh and unforgiving world: the camp, the war, and the disappearance of his father, a resistance fighter, without a trace. Ahmed observes the camp society, its culture, and his mother's concern for others' honor and reputation—especially when her daughters are involved—and her strictness in this matter. In contrast, Ahmed enjoys accompanying his grandfather to prayer and social gatherings at the camp's mosque. Ahmed watches the political developments in the camp, Gaza, the West Bank, and across the occupied territories. He observes curfews, blockades, the relentless capture of resistance fighters, and collective punishment. He witnesses the normalization of the occupation, material stability, work permits, and leisure trips to the occupied territories, through which more people are coerced or forced to collaborate with the enemy. Ahmed sees Israeli prisons from which he, his relatives, and acquaintances were released and observes the power of determination and organization in changing reality. Most of all, Ahmed sees how the fight for freedom evolves in response to these conditions. Ahmed follows the rise of Hamas through the characters who developed, shaped, and embodied it. The narrator plays the role of an involved observer. He doesn't just watch; he accompanies Ibrahim in his work, studies, and struggle. This distance between Ibrahim and the movement he represents makes Ibrahim a figure whose greatness transcends

the movement. Although Ibrahim does not engage directly with the occupying forces and only attains martyrdom at the end of the book, he knows his fate from the beginning and pursues it without attachment to his wife and children. Perhaps Ibrahim symbolizes a state that the narrator aspires for in society or the ideal individual that the author hopes Hamas will create—a figure who achieves their goals by shaping their self-definition and establishing a political institution for Palestinians.

For the narrator, Ibrahim symbolizes the concept of the "self-made man," which manifests in two instances. First, the narrator mentions that Ibrahim's self-made nature grants him a sense of self-governance and purpose. He even became a professional builder, learning the trade from his friend, with whom he partnered, hired a laborer, and secured medium-sized construction contracts. In the second instance, the self-made individual is also a true leader.



Arab villagers fleeing from an unidentified area in the Galilee in October 1948.  
● REUTERS

Thus, being self-made is the foundation of a political leader capable of confronting the circumstances of occupation. "Every day, Ibrahim grew more transcendent and respected in my eyes; he was the one who grew up an orphan after his father was martyred when he was four years old, then was abandoned by his mother while still young, raised among us, and became a self-made man, and a true leader despite his young age and the difficult circumstances under occupation."

### "Übermensch" drives the resistance

In existential philosophy, Nietzsche introduces the idea of the "Übermensch" or the "superhuman"; an individual who embodies true freedom and has the power to shape their own destiny. According to Nietzsche, the transcendent individual is one who selects their goals and defines their values and principles without succumbing to societal pressures beyond their control. This concept invites individuals to embrace the "will to power," an inner drive toward freedom and self-sovereignty. Thus, the Übermensch is an intellectual model of a person who breaks societal norms and creates new values.

In contrast, Sinwar's transcendent individual is the self-made political figure; someone who chooses their goals in a way that contributes to their political liberation. They engage in shaping their identity and defining their values within the social and political framework that encompasses them. This process is not merely a personal quest for freedom but a political act that involves challenging and contributing to the formation of collective identity in a way that serves the freedom of the entire society.

The politically transcendent individual, through the self-made philosophy, is a model of the practical person who deals with inherited societal values—social, moral, and religious—as resources to strengthen their commu-

nity's drive for liberation and achieve political ascendance. They understand that their struggle against occupation is an existential battle and a war on the Palestinian "will to power"; that is, a war for their political self-governance. In this context, the self-made philosophy transcends individual autonomy and becomes a tool to influence and shape political discourse. The hardworking individual, committed to achieving their liberatory goal, harnesses all the efforts of others toward this objective. Regarding the Islamic Resistance Movement, it seeks through Islamic values to produce this transcendent individual or this elevated state within the Palestinian individual.

### Awakening of Islamic consciousness

The novel begins in the winter of 1967, just before the Naksa (the result of the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab nations), when Gaza was under Egyptian administration. Ahmed, then five years old, recounts one of his earli-

est memories—his interactions with Egyptian soldiers, whom he frequently visited. They played with him and gave him and his friends pistachio sweets. Then the war begins, and the soldiers shout at them to return, no longer giving them sweets.

"The occupation forces faced fierce resistance in one area and withdrew. Shortly after, a group of tanks and military jeeps appeared, flying Egyptian flags. The resistance fighters rejoiced, thinking reinforcements had arrived, and they emerged from their positions and trenches, firing into the air in celebration. They gathered to welcome the reinforcements, but when the convoy approached, heavy fire was opened on the fighters, killing them. Then, the Zionist flag was raised on those tanks and vehicles instead of the Egyptian flags."

This scene marks an ideological turning point in the Palestinian struggle: the realization of the failure or inadequacy of Arab nationalism as a political current in instilling the necessary seriousness in individuals toward the Palestinian national cause, especially in the face of increasing challenges. The philosophy of the self-made individual carries with it the condition of seriousness and commitment in pursuing one's goals: "Self-made individuals view their goals with respect and conviction and approach their achievement with the utmost seriousness. Without compromise, they are simply committed to doing what it takes to achieve them." Here, the "extraordinary connection between religion and nationalism" achieves this seriousness through the obligation of jihad or holy war, imbuing the national cause with sanctity and planting in the individual the strict seriousness necessary to achieve it, as

A Palestinian man holds an explosive device during an Israeli military raid in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, on July 4, 2023.  
● MAJDI MOHAMMED/AP



Smoke rises after Israeli strikes on the seaport of Gaza City, in Gaza, October 10, 2023.  
● MOHAMMED SALEM/REUTERS

the narrator states: "So that the battle takes its true dimensions and meets the required standards."

When the self-made political individual surveys the situation, they find the Islamic system among the last social systems that has remained steadfast in the face of sociocide—the destruction of society—committed by the occupation. They find, in the intertwining of political practice and faith, in the transfer of the Palestinian's existence and purpose to Allah, a principle that the enemy cannot disintegrate. The self-made individual sees in historical Islamic sites stable political edifices against the occupation's attempts to erode awareness and distort direction. Hence, we find Ibrahim referring to the battle as a "battle of civilization, history, and existence," organizing a trip for the youth to learn about their hidden lands and sacred Islamic historical sites, with the most significant being Al-Aqsa Mosque. These sites embody the flourishing of Palestinian culture, sovereignty, and the shaping of their land's destiny.

Here, the architecture of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the majestic Dome of the Rock stands in stark contrast to the architecture of the refugee camp, which represents the state of confinement for Palestinians. Therefore, Hamas places special emphasis on Al-Aqsa to highlight the sacred historical meanings that immortalize the Palestinian cause, such as the Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), forming a point of connection between the land of Palestine and the heavens. Perhaps this is why the battle for the freedom of Palestinian prisoners has been named The Flood of Al-Aqsa—to emphasize that the freedom of Palestinians carries a divine significance, and their liberation is a purpose for which they were created.

### 'Asceticism' drives struggle through emotions

The novel pays special attention to the stage of "training and preparation" in the history of Hamas's formation. One

day, a sheikh named Ahmed walks by the youth and adolescents in the camp, who wander the streets and pass their time playing. He warns them against idle amusements and urges them to instead engage in prayer, worship, and contemplation, linking all of this to the future of Islam, whose flag, he says, must be raised in the land of Palestine. He then spends decades with them, instilling Islamic values that promote asceticism and the renunciation of worldly desires in favor of the hereafter, creating a generation "capable of sacrifice and selflessness."

Perhaps the novel's thesis is also about love—love, which in Islamic terms represents the strongest bond with oneself and "worldly life." In this novel, it is shown how love, alongside asceticism, reinforces the meaning of existence in political action. The narrator says: "A sense of peace overwhelmed me... Is this love? (...) Later, I was content to watch her go to university from afar. I desired nothing more, not even a glance. It was enough for me to love, and for her to understand that well." Thus, Ahmed is content with knowing love in his own world and postpones pursuing it until the time when he can propose to the woman "who grew up from childhood." He doesn't feel the need for love simply because it is something he has always heard about.

Ibrahim then clarifies to Ahmed that he too knew love but, seeing himself as part of the national struggle, decided not to pursue it. He said: "It becomes a whip that the occupiers lash across the backs of lovers. Ahmed, when they map out this sacred, honorable relationship, they force them to abandon their first love—Jerusalem. Does love still have a place in our lives?" Ibrahim explains how structured asceticism in Islamic philosophy is reflected in political life. It is this training that enables individuals to struggle at any time.

The novel is also referred to as *The Thorn and the Clove* in some accounts.

