Moving at the Speed of Trust: An Interview with Yazan Khalili

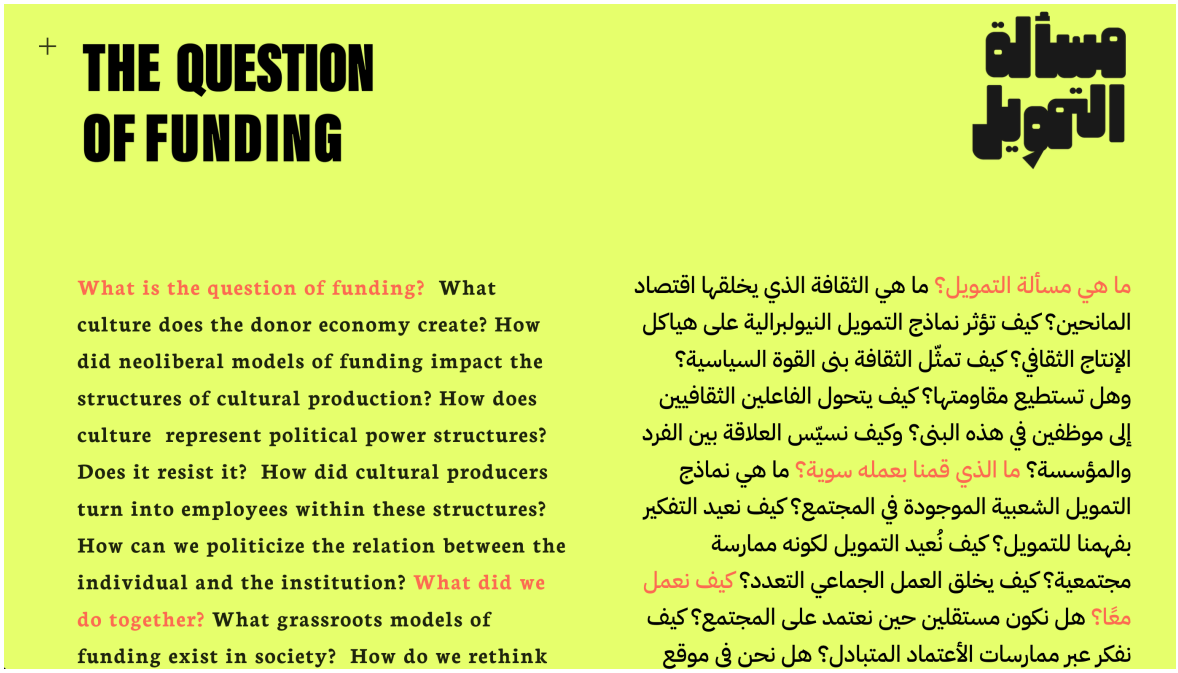
T J Demos

Yazan Khalili is a researcher, visual artist and cultural activist. Khalili operates in and out of Palestine and is currently based in Amsterdam, where he is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam as part of the **Imaginart** research group. His work has been featured in major exhibitions, including Documenta Fifteen (2022), MoMA's New Photography (2018), and the Sharjah Biennial (2013). He was the artistic director of the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah between 2015 and 2019, and co-founded **Radio Alhara** in 2020 and **The Question of Funding** collective in 2019. The following interview took place on Zoom on 7 March 2025 and was subsequently edited for length and clarity.

TJD: We last spoke in Amsterdam this past December – after first meeting over a decade ago in Ramallah. Our conversation touched briefly on the politics of funding and your recent efforts to make economics an immanent part of artistic practice. With the imposition of new austerity budgets and mounting pressure to secure funding – set against the backdrop of the unfolding genocide in Gaza and escalating institutional repression – these questions have only grown more urgent. I'd like to delve deeper in this interview, but to begin, could you tell me more about your practice?

YK: I am a Palestinian researcher, artist, architect, production coordinator – a jack-of-all-trades, as they say. Perhaps it is a condition of the neoliberal economy we have been living under, the freelancing, the gig economy, and dependency on the donor economy through institutional funding and art-residency-hopping, that has made me, like many of my generation, a multitasker and less grounded whether within a profession or in a place. The way we practice art is very much a result of the economic structures we depend on in our day to day lives. Conscious of these conditions, I co-founded The Question of Funding, a collective of artists and cultural producers from Palestine and beyond, which researches the economic structures of art, aims to produce new economic models for cultural production and rethinks what art can become as a result of these models. I am currently based in Amsterdam, finishing my PhD research in the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA), focusing on the cultural

economy in Palestine, examining grassroots cultural movements since the 1980s and the transformation that happened with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the early 1990s with the introduction of the donor economy. One of my research projects is on groups of cultural workers who are returning to the land to live and work, creating cultural practice through economic practice. My work at the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre was centred around the affirmative critique of the donor economy and finding ways to think of culture through economic questions.



From The Question of Funding's website homepage: https://thequestionoffunding.com

TJD: Can you say more about cultural workers returning to the land? Also, how have these returns been impacted by the last two years of Israel's relentless siege on Gaza and the recent attacks on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories?

YK: Different groups have been returning to the land in Palestine since the 1970s, following Israeli land dispossession and the exploitation of Palestinian *fallahin* (peasants, or agriculturalists) in the Israeli labour market. These have been either as political or voluntary movements. I'm now focused on groups that are related in different ways to the institutional cultural scene, who are taking up small plots of land in the villages around the city of Ramallah, mainly in Area C (Israeli-controlled territory) that is under threat of confiscation. Farms such as Om Sulieman, Ard al-Ya's and Ard al-Fallah are variously connected to the cultural scene in Ramallah. I am interested in artists' returning to the land as an economic and livelihood movement and understanding it simultaneously as a cultural act. In doing so, they're creating an economic model that can sustain itself without depending on funding or the donor economy, which, since the early 1990s, has come to dominate Palestinian cultural activity and its infrastructure.

Rather than operate via donor economy institutions, where culture and economy are separate – where you apply for funding, and if you get the money then you do your projects – these recent practitioners are approaching culture from its economic basis. These returns to the land turn economy *into* a cultural practice, as an intervention *in* culture. It is an intervention in the means of production that allows new culture to emerge and produce the means of living. For instance, they're practising a land-based economy, growing and selling fruits and vegetables, based on different knowledges they've learned from their surroundings and their ancestors, which is in itself a cultural practice and a livelihood. I see culture as a product of the economic medium within which it is working.

This movement is crucial now in Palestine, at a time when the land is being destroyed and confiscated by the Zionist regime. Returning to it brings back the origin of the Palestinian struggle. It is about the connection between the people and the land, going beyond the symbolism of artistic presentation. Rather, the land becomes a daily practice of *sumud* [steadfastness] and resilience.

Om Sleiman farm, Bil'in, Ramallah, 2024, with the Modi'in settlement in the background, photo by Yazan Khalili

TJD: This feels imperative these days, especially as liberal institutions internationally are increasingly subjected to repression and defunding. Defending them against neofascism by returning to the *status quo ante* hardly seems the answer when the compromised politics and values of liberal institutions have been revealed to be collaborationist to begin with, including during the Gaza genocide. Finding other funding models – or as you say, rethinking economy *as* cultural practice – appears more urgent than ever. How do Palestinian organisations in the

West Bank like Dar Jacir, for example, the Bethlehem-based independent artist-run initiative founded in 2014, and Sakiya, the Ramallah-based academy for experimental artistic and ecological knowledge production, connect to what you're talking about? And what about the Owneh initiative, of some thirty Palestinian civil society organisations that reject global funding systems built on historical exploitation that have prolonged the occupation in Palestine?[1] Are you part of this organisation?

Home by Vivian Sansour (in progress), Dar Jacir Landscape Residency, Bethlehem, Palestine, July – December 2018, photographer unknown, courtesy of Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research

YK: For me, it is a question of how the economic model and cultural practice intertwine rather than the cultural practice itself. I wouldn't put Dar Jacir and Sakiya in the same category as the farms, although they both do great work based on land practices and research. But I don't see them approaching it from an economic stance. I think of them rather as land-based cultural institutions. They are dependent on the donor economy and funding opportunities, as well as on the social-capital economy of the international contemporary art scene. What they do is important in that aspect. As for Owneh, it is part of a different history of initiatives seeking to establish more balanced power relations with donors – placing conditions on funding from the perspective of the recipients. This is an important and necessary approach that deserves support.

[1] For Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research, see https://darjacir.com; for Sakiya, see https://sakiya.org; and for the Owneh initiative, see www.saledocks.net/post/owneh-arte-filantropia-tossica-e-autonomia-in-palestina, accessed 5 December 2025

I am not personally involved with it, as I am no longer affiliated with any NGO in Palestine. My current focus is on imagining and practising alternative economic models that move beyond the donor economy, emphasising instead collective and solidarity-based sharing of resources within the community.

TJD: For the groups you're talking about, is it a 'question of landing', or how to return to the land, then, by cultivating relations to the land at the local level without relying on outside donor support or international art world connections?

YK: Yes, absolutely. These farms and *fallahin* operate off the radar of international cultural institutions and the contemporary art economy. They don't have websites, although they use social media to communicate with their community. They represent different models, not one unified model. Some use community-supported agricultural systems (CSAs), and create veg baskets for sale in advance. Others sell directly to the village where they plant and live. They're more communally connected than others. Some are small family operations, where a couple of brothers and their mother work, maintain goats and work as shepherds. These operations may also be connected with the cultural scene, for instance, through dancing or some other cultural activities. More than exclusively creating culture, they are cultivating the land. Nonetheless, they are still getting attention in many ways and yet are also very wary about it. One of the farmers told me once: 'don't make us bigger than what we are. We want to stay focused on our context, not become this sort of international spectacle.' It's not that they don't sometimes travel and meet others – they *are* connected, people do find them. But they're not interested in artistic mobility, they don't see the contemporary art system as the centre of their practices. This might sound unexceptional in other places in the world, where returning to the land is becoming a global phenomenon. But in Palestine, the land is the most political issue; stealing land is the core of settler colonialism and returning to it is the core of the Indigenous struggle for survival.

TJD: Switching gears, I want to ask you about the new levels of repression, censorship and de-platforming we are experiencing in civil society and the arts, which has accompanied Israel's genocidal attacks. The repression has played out internationally on university campuses, in art institutions and on social media. How do you think we should organise otherwise or anew? And what do you see as the challenges and the central political objectives of cultural practice, given the present conjuncture?

YK: This is a big question. The developments over the last three years, since the beginning of the war on Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and the shifts happening with Trump, tell us that history is widely open to changes. Whatever we thought or got used to as a given is totally able to shift. In the last thirty years, we got used to neoliberal policies and structures and lost our ability and tools to work and think outside of them. Our dependency on financial funds and

institutional support to work, connect and live has made us lose the knowhows of other social and economic structures and relations.

In response, we must cultivate the ability to recognise the oppression embedded within the systems we live in while also maintaining channels of communication and connection beyond our familiar, comfortable ways of engaging. I don't have a definitive answer here, but from my perspective, the key is to remain engaged with the economy in particular – viewing it as a political space rather than a neutral one. This means continuously reflecting on ways to survive, work and, at times, separate our intellectual pursuits from the economic structures we participate in.

Seeing how funding has been used to suppress political and cultural expression in the US and Germany shows us to what degree we have become dependent on funding. Now that the system has shifted towards a fascist and rightwing politics, funding has become the tool of discipline and repression of speech and political expression. That was the main leverage the state possessed: our dependency on funding to work and produce, to come together and maintain spaces. This neoliberal type of funding, this state and donor funding, it's what we need now to emancipate ourselves from somehow.

TJD: It sounds like you're talking about neoliberal state funding as a mode of counter-insurgency, as a form of political control, a mechanism of repression?

YK: Funding is always part of power relations. Especially when it comes at a time of turning economy into a financial economy, a monetised economy, as the only way to understand value, production, exchange. Over the years, we have lost our ability to see economy as anything other than monetary, we don't see it as a *political* economy.

Living now in Europe raises questions about the role of the state, particularly in relation to taxation. Citizens pay taxes to the state, only to see those very funds being used to control and influence society – often against the interests of the people contributing the funds, where representational democracy influences the political power of governance by asserting control over the public money. This brings into focus questions about the relationship between economy and democracy. A clear example can be seen in the Netherlands, where taxes continue to be collected yet we witness the system's impact through budget cuts to universities, the arts and increasing restrictions on dissent. Despite being taxpayers, our ability to challenge these decisions is limited. To contest these developments, there needs to be direct democracy, to enable communities to participate in the decisions about how taxes are being used.

In Palestine, we have had a donor economy that has exerted power over us for a long time. Meaning that international and private donors, mainly from the US and Europe, have used financial power to influence the culture and politics in Palestine. Palestine serves as an extreme example, a dangerous model of the future, revealing how the military's and donors' influence and power work together to enforce hegemony, suppressing any possible political emancipation.

TJD: Yes, it's like what Yousef Munayyer says: '…Palestine is the canary in the coal mine of authoritarianism and repression. The bombs they drop in Palestine won't stay there. The laws that target Palestine won't stop there. The tech tools they abuse won't be limited to there.' [2]

YK: Sadly, Palestine has been pushed outside of the current world order, made into a laboratory to experiment with all models and tools of death and suppression. It is there that extreme, unchecked power is practised, and where the limits of the new world order are being established. *Palestine is the world in its future tense*.

This is why, again, it is crucial to see how communities in Palestine and around the world are finding ways to resist, for example, by building alternative funding mechanisms. These efforts may be small, invisible or not yet widely felt, but they exist. There are always movements – community-driven initiatives that foster alternative economic interdependencies – ensuring that society is not entirely subjected to the structures of donor-driven economies.

TJD: In the US, we are witnessing an intensifying situation where debt is being politically mobilised to reshape subjectivity in profound ways. This is particularly evident in the university, where the shift from public to private funding is accelerating – including within public institutions like the University of California where I work. At the same time, tuition is rising, at a university where attendance was once free (from 1868 until 1970).[3] The university is increasingly becoming an engine for mass-producing debt. When students take on this financial burden as tuition rises, debt fundamentally reshapes their values and priorities, forcing them to focus on repayment rather than engaging in critical, speculative, non-instrumentalised intellectual pursuits. This resonates with what's happening in European institutions and even connects to the broader spectrum that includes Palestine.

That's why I find your approach to rethinking economy as cultural practice so provocative. It challenges the notion that economy can be separated from lived practice and instead positions it as something that must be actively reconfigured. The economy should be repoliticised, just as politics must be re-economised. In previous interviews, you have discussed the political choice of moving away from debt as a tool of governance and reclaiming it as a site of communal wealth. Your exploration of alternative funding systems, including decentralised autonomous organisations (DAOs) and forms of value produced within local, non-financialised economies, directly engages with these questions.

Can you speak more about this – especially your perspective on how systems like DAOs could function under conditions of extreme societal breakdown, violence and destruction? You once

[2] See Yousef Munayyer on Instagram: www.instagram.com/p/DG8OEfTsM2J/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link, accessed 5 December 2025

[3] See Lilia Vega, 'The history of UC tuition since 1868', *The Daily Californian*, 22 December 2014, www.dailycal.org/archives/the-history-of-uc-tuition-since-1868/article_12b00b4e-5074-5830-8d89-99fd3bbc148c.html, accessed 5 December 2025

said, 'We need a system like DAOs badly, especially in the context of genocide.' I'm interested in how such a system could operate in crisis zones and what kinds of resources it might provide.

YK: I'll approach the question in a way similar to what motivated The Question of Funding collective, when we understood that we can't approach cultural production without speaking about its economic aspect. Cultural production stems from a certain economy. In itself, culture creates an economy around it, and culture and economy are products of each other.

When we began trying to find models of engaging culturally with economy, we thought about how debt has changed the way we work and the way we understand value. We wanted to take value outside its neoliberal use and bring it into communal relations, where it can be understood through the daily practices of people. How do we exchange value? How does communal wealth move within the community, how do we preserve its value, and how do we trust each other in this exchange? These questions are not abstract. It is not a theory looking for a practice. Rather, it originates in institutional practice, as through my work at the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre where we had to find ways of working with the community without a budget. We had no funding, and the institution was in total collapse.

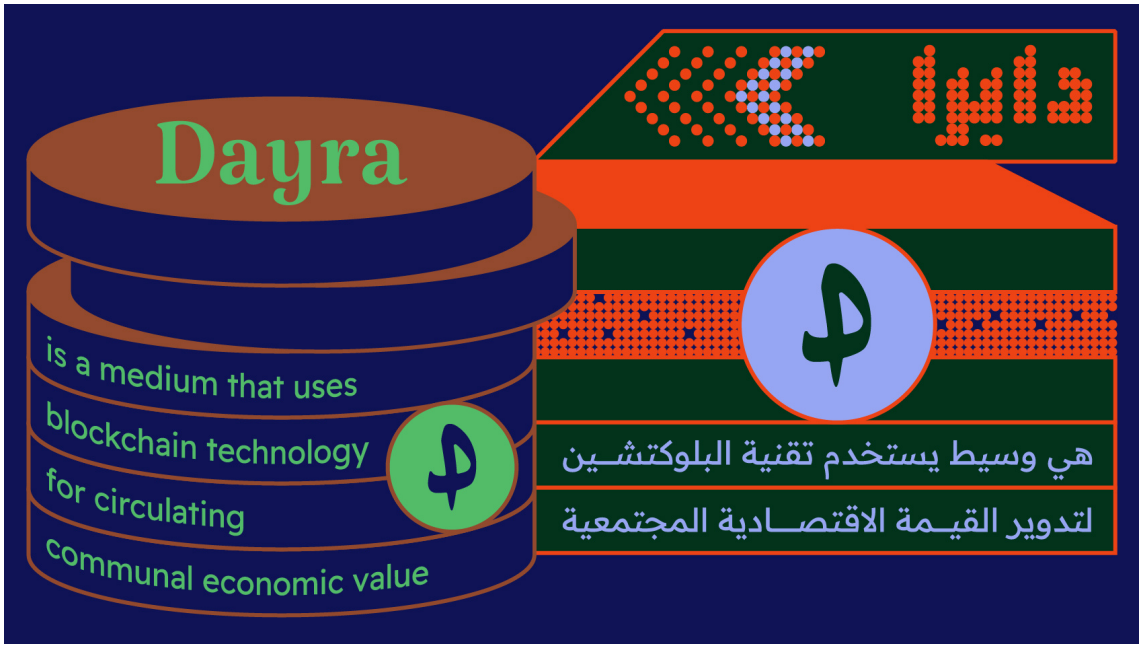
TJD: So what did you do with this 'culturisation' of economy?

YK: In the beginning it looked like we had only two choices: either shut down or reinvent ourselves to fit the new funding models – adapting to secure more grants and crafting proposals that aligned with the required frameworks. We chose neither. We had to craft a different approach, to see this crisis of instability as an opportunity to rethink the economy and reimagine the Khalil Sakakini Centre from its economic foundations. We opened the Centre as both space and asset – as a form of shared wealth within society – transforming it into a platform for exchange. Cultural practice became an act of exchanging wealth and value, allowing the Centre to function beyond conventional funding structures. What allowed for this was the fact that the building where the Centre is located was leased to us by the Ministry of Culture and we didn't have to pay rent. This gave us a physical ground to stand on while prefiguring our approach. This is vital. Places in such moments of transformation are crucial as they become meeting points, with material results.

We asked: how do you transform the spaces, the rooms, the equipment, the history, the administration – all the elements that make up the Centre – into a form of communal wealth that society can share and use? Through this process of sharing, culture can be produced. When these exchanges take place, they lay the foundation for a new economy to emerge and be built. This is where The Question of Funding originated – rethinking funding not just as a means of survival but as a way to generate alternative economic models. It started as a question born out of a funding crisis. But rather than seeking a direct answer, the focus was on collectively exploring experimental ways to approach the economy. Over time, funders took notice – they saw a successful, thriving model and wanted to support it, but with the intention of taking

control. Because the model was deeply rooted in communal support, it was able to resist being overtaken by donors and maintain its autonomy. It's not that we rejected funding entirely, but it made up only about thirty per cent of the Centre's overall economy. The remaining seventy per cent operated outside of traditional financial structures, yet it still functioned as an alternative economy – one built on exchange and communal wealth. That allows us as cultural producers to see beyond top-down funding and begin engaging in communal and mutual types of funding, to live ways of being together that are not dependent on the donor economy.

From there, we began thinking, how do we open the Centre up? Can it evolve into something that connects with other economies and different aspects of society? That's where Dayra emerged – the idea of using blockchain as an exchange system for community value.[4] But we have since realised that the technology itself isn't the essential part; we can accomplish the same goals with something as simple as an Excel sheet. What truly matters is political engagement and mutual dependence in building cultural and knowledge-based networks. For instance, there is a group called Learning Palestine – a group of artists, academics, intellectuals and community members, who aim to disseminate knowledge on the history of the ongoing struggle for justice, liberation and freedom of Palestine and the Palestinian people – and they use a basic Excel sheet to coordinate efforts across the world.[5] This network translates, publishes, and republishes texts on Palestine, prints pamphlets and circulates them – all with minimal reliance on money. It's a kind of a solidarity economy.



[4] See 'Darya or how to circulate communal economic value' on The Question of Funding website: https://thequestionoffunding.com/How-can-Dayra-allow-us-to-make-use-of-existing-local-resources-1; and 'Daryra – How It Works?' on Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/721710848, accessed 5 December 2025

[5] See the Learning Palestine website: https://learningpalestine.net, accessed 5 December 2025

TJD: Learning Palestine shared the Palestinian Pavilion's Manifesto from the 2024 Venice Biennale, which reads in part: 'Now is the time for art and poetry. For art that rejects the logic of prevailing power. For poetry that resists the totalizing narratives that fuel the killing machines of the perpetrator. Art is inherently political – in its message, production, and presentation. It engages with society, assuming a role either in complicity or resistance. Art and poetry represent our liberated knowledge, freed from the belly of the beast.'[6]

THE PALESTINIAN PAVILION

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF ART?

A manifesto against the state of the world

In a world where genocide unfolds before our very eyes, shielded by nation-state rhetoric and bolstered by the imperial powers of our times, we bear witness to unspeakable horrors. This witnessing is not metaphorical—it is stark reality. To witness now is to be complicit; ignorance is no excuse, and inaction is cowardice.

What is it that cannot be stopped?

The global state structure, which dominated the 20th century, not only allows but actively enables genocide in Gaza and elsewhere in this world. Every genocide is perpetuated by a state. This machinery of destruction, guided by settler colonialism, fueled by capitalism, empowered by technological might, and covered by complicit media giants, must be dismantled. We are confronted with ongoing efforts to alienate us from our political agency and the ability to strive towards a moral and just world for all. We ask: If this level of atrocity is now acceptable, then what is deemed unacceptable? We must reconsider what structures national identities have produced and restore our severed connection to the land as a source of our identity and political existence.

The Palestinian struggle and resistance comes to remind us of what should not be forgotten: the people and the land embody each other, in time and place. It is within this unbreakable bond that we envision the future, it is within this bond that we learn from the past, and through it we engage with our present. We refuse the state of the world: the brutality of maintaining the hegemony of the powerful and the complicity of those who turn a blind eye to injustice.

What role can art and poetry play in a future built on genocide?

The Zionist state's atrocities permeate every level of existence. It devours all human knowledge and science by utilizing technology and social engineering to produce killing targets and destruction lists. Within these new artificial intelligence technologies, every total meaning can be devoured, every total meaning can kill.

Now is the time for art and poetry. For art that rejects the logic of prevailing power. For poetry that resists the totalizing narratives that fuel the killing machines of the perpetrator. Art is inherently political—in its message, production, and presentation. It engages with society, assuming a role either in complicity or resistance.

Art and poetry represent our liberated knowledge, freed from the belly of the beast. This moment demands that we reclaim our political agency; in its clarity, it empowers us to turn imagination into affirmative actions, forging poetic structures of collectivity—a return to the essence of our humanity. We belong to the world, to the earth, to the land, and through this agency, we move, act, and refuse to be silent accomplices to the state's atrocities. We cannot ignore the oppressive conditions under which creativity thrives. Faced with censorship or co-option, we must resist glorifying the regime or fading into obscurity.

We must defend our agency as political beings, stateless as humanity itself, collective as what our societies are, we are bound to organize and resist on multiple fronts to halt the genocide and prevent it as a future.

PALESTINE IS THE WORLD IN ITS FUTURE TENSE.

YK: I find that important at these times. Liberating knowledge is about building networks and forming connections driven by our commitment to Palestine. Because we are politically connected, deeply aware of the intensity of the moment, and recognise the urgency of coming together, we also understand the importance of independence from external funding. These independent and interdependent structures hold an economy within themselves – one that is based on exchange and is inherently productive in a cultural sense. Palestine shouldn't be seen only as a national struggle and a national identity, but rather as an identity of time. The proximity to it defines our political being and our understanding of justice.

TJD: That makes a lot of sense, insofar as 'independence from external funding' can also entail challenging the funding of injustice, war and genocide, in line with the international

[6] See 'The Palestinian Pavilion. What is the Future of Art? A manifesto against the state of the world', https://learningpalestine.hotglue.me/?The+Manifesto, accessed 5 December 2025

Palestine solidarity movement, which has called for divestment from the arms industry and the cessation of weapons and technology transfers to the genocidal IDF. As Anthony Lowenstein describes it, and as you mention above, Palestine has become a 'laboratory' for weapons experimentation and research and development, with Israeli military products marketed globally. Given this, it's clear that questioning the structural foundations of the economy is an ethical imperative. In this context, refusing governance by debt – as political refusal – seems crucial. Here it's a 'question of *de*funding'. I'm also intrigued by what you mentioned about documenta 15 (2022) – the crisis of which is usefully contextualised by Dirk Moses[7] – and how it became an institutional pressure point, targeting artists, including your collective The Question of Funding, who were seen as threatening to Germany's established order. That order demands obedience to a misguided *Staatsräson*, which binds the country's historical responsibility for the Holocaust to unconditional support for Israel, which in practice means supporting unwavering arms exports to Israel, anti-BDS measures and the suppression of pro-Palestinian activism – even while Israel is committing a genocide in Gaza.

Can you elaborate more on how you see Documenta unfolding? The fact that Documenta recently introduced a new 'code of conduct' for the next Documenta 16 – which will happen in 2027 – and now recognises the absurd IHRA definition of antisemitism, raises important questions too. What does this mean for the future of Documenta and the broader European art world? Do you see this trend spreading across Europe, as it seems to be in the US as well?

YK: I don't want to sound like an expert about German history and politics. My main interaction with German cultural and political spheres happened during documenta 15 through a series of events, media attacks, institutional misconduct and social interactions that made me feel that a new Germany, or an old Germany, was being born. Two structures of law were being set in place, one that protects the freedom of expression by constitutional and legal measures, the other being a censorship regime made by extensive media campaigns, political interventions and institutional suppression using state funding and media as ways to threaten and scare artists and cultural institutions.

Funding, in this case, plays a major role in establishing the grey zone outside of the legal framework. Its threatened withdrawal became a political tool of censorship because most of the civil society in Germany is dependent on state funding. So, as with the Bundestag's Anti-BDS non-binding law of 2018, the main weapon the German political parties use to suppress BDS – which is technically constitutionally protected as freedom of expression – has been to threaten any institution that hosts or supports BDS with the cutting of federal funds.

[7] See A Dirk Moses, 'The German Campaign against Cultural Freedom:Documenta 15 in Context', *Greyroom*, downloadoable PDF availabler on https://www.greyroom.org/issues/92/219/the-german-campaign-against-cultural-freedom-documenta-15-in-context/

We can call what happened at documenta 15 as Germany's cultural shock doctrine moment, after Naomi Klein's book.[8] If the sacred 'documenta', an institution that defines German cultural hegemony and power in the post-World War II era, can be attacked, then who *can't* be attacked? After that, German civil society capitulated. Civil society, it turns out, has no backbone, because it has no ability to resist state oppression weaponising the cultural funding it monopolises. The state makes civil society vulnerable to extreme political changes. But when these cases of censorship are taken to the courts to fight the state's repression, these cases usually win. For example, Oyoun won the case against the state for withdrawing funding due to their political stand because it was unconstitutional.

TJD: You're referring to Oyoun, the progressive cultural centre in Berlin's Neukölln area that was notified in 2024 by the Berlin Senate that its four-year project funding would suddenly be cut after it refused to cancel a pro-Palestinian event, 'Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East'.[9] In May 2024, they won a court case against the media outlet *Tagesspiegel*, which had falsely accused them of making antisemitic statements. And they successfully challenged the funding withdrawal initiated by Berlin's culture minister, Joe Chialo (who stepped down around the same time following his controversial cuts to the city's cultural budget and introduction of a contentious 'anti-discrimination clause' for cultural funding applicants).

YK: Yes. But while in Germany things seem to have collapsed, you also see grassroot movements coming together to fight this oppression. I hear from friends in Berlin that there are actually many movements coming together these days. The social media image of Germany becoming a totally fascist state is overblown. On the ground, there are numerous formations, meetings and spaces that operate beyond the reach of the state.[10]

In places like the Netherlands, change is happening at a slower pace. While there is some movement, a certain distance from power still allows smaller independent institutions to speak out and attempt political interventions. When I say *political*, I mainly refer to pro-Palestine expression, as that is where political discourse feels most explosive. Otherwise, in the Netherlands, nearly any other topic can be discussed freely. That said, funding is increasingly shaping policies – whether by reinforcing systems of oppression or pressuring institutions to shift their approaches. This is particularly evident in universities, where financial influence is having a growing impact.

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8 See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Penguin, London, 2008

9 See https://oyoun.de; also, for more analysis and historical contextualisation within German cultural politics, see Nikki Columbus, 'How Germany Silenced Its Artists to Support Israel', *The Nation*, October 2025, www.thenation.com/article/world/berlin-palestine-solidarity-israel-criticism/# , accessed 5 December 2025

10 For more on this, see T J Demos, 'Gaza Genocide, German Cultural Politics and the Inadequacy of Form: An Interview with Jumana Manna', *Third Text Forum, Thinking Gaza: Critical Interventions*, 16 May 2025, www.thirdtext.org/jumanamanna-interview, accessed 5 December 2025

Funnily enough, in Palestine, whenever the Palestinian Authority decided to censor a show, the civil society, which benefits from international funding, managed to come together and oppose censorship, because they are not dependent on the PA for funding. But much of this Palestinian civil society is funded, ironically, by the same states that are now censoring their own European civil spheres. So, we have to keep in mind the complexity of funding politics and how it influences state and civil society institutions in different ways.

TJD: At documenta 15, The Question of Funding collaborated with Eltiqa, the artists collective founded in 2000 in Gaza and who have supported younger generations of artists through workshops and exhibitions and by offering a space to meet and dialogue in Gaza City – that is, until the last two years of Israel's relentless assaults on the strip.[11] How have they fared over the course of that time?

The Question of Funding hosts the Eltiqa collective at documenta 15 in Kassel, Germany, in 2022, installation view with paintings by Mohamed Abusal (left) and Mohammed Al-Hawajri (right), photo by Nils Klinger

YK: Connecting and working with Eltiqa group in the past four years has been a crucial experience for The Question of Funding collective – first, through engaging with their practice and connecting to their history as a group working in Gaza throughout the years of the siege; then, learning how they, as a group of artists, came together to create and support the cultural infrastructure in Gaza. Later, together with Eltiqa members, we suffered through the harsh attacks from the documenta institution and the German media during the documenta 15 period, including acts of censorship and intimidation. When the genocide began, we had to figure out

[11] See the Eltiqa collective's website: https://eltiqa.com/gcap

how we could support them beyond sending them money, which we did do at the beginning. At some point we built a campaign to help some of the members leave Gaza. We also helped them bring some of their artworks out. Later we worked with them on archiving their stories and photographs, collecting their works scattered around the world, and then curated an extended second iteration of our contribution to the documenta 15 exhibition at the Art Jameel foundation in Dubai, where some members of Eltiqa now live. We wanted to create a support network around them that they can depend on and use whenever possible. It was really a challenge to figure out what we can do in a direct way. We found that it is important to work on two levels: the general one, where we struggle collectively to stop the genocide; and the personal one, where we take care of a family or an individual and try to be their extended family and community.

At this point, half of the Eltiqa members have managed to leave Gaza, and are scattered around the world, and the other half are still there. It is a tragedy on all levels. Hearing from them directly about what is going on is even more extreme than what we hear on the news.

Work by artists in the Eltiqa collective at Art Jameel, Dubai, 6 February – 20 July 2025, curated by The Question of Funding

TJD: In the US, under the shadow of the Israeli genocide and cultural censorship, liberal politicians and institutional administrators claim to defend expression against illiberalism by upholding freedom of speech. But, in doing so, they are reshaping the very concept of free speech, complicit in conflating Jewish identity with Israeli identity in the process. Under the guise of protecting free expression, they ultimately adopt illiberal tactics themselves, weaponising accusations of antisemitism to shut down criticism of Israel or of its genocide in Gaza in civil society, academic discourse and social media. This repression is then extended by the far right, who use it to justify broader attacks on critical race theory, decolonisation and LGBTQ rights – creating an increasingly restrictive and authoritarian space. Resistance becomes difficult when institutions face the threat of defunding, and when they themselves set the tone of repression.

If we are to preserve critical discourse and autonomy, here again we must rethink the economy – not just as a financial system, but, as you say, as a political form and cultural practice.

YK: We are witnessing language becoming acrobatic, like with humanitarian laws. Regimes and state institutions are playing with words. They are turning free speech into an oppressive act. You can seemingly do whatever you want with it, making wild arguments that have no basis in reality. Like in a German debate where decolonisation is deemed antisemitic, just like the UN and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)!

As Palestinians, we have been living under these kind of acrobatic languages for decades. It doesn't make sense. It is *made* to make sense only by platform power; whoever controls the platform controls the meaning. Sometimes I feel we Palestinians are placed on permanent mute in a Zoom call. We are there, but no one can hear us. We hear everyone talking about and around us, but no one hears us, so we scream. But our scream is muted. And when it manages to break out from the muted Zoom screen glass, it is repressed, destroyed and killed. In opposing this system, we lack platform power and face a situation in which progressive politics itself is becoming just one of the many conspiracy theories that exist in the world. It's possible to say the most wrong things in the most elaborate ways now. We've lost the basis of truth and facts.

TJD: Against this backdrop, you emphasise the importance of building *trust relationships*, which emerge from mutual indebtedness and connections that foster community. This idea, which you've developed with The Question of Funding, suggests that collectivising debt based on trust can create meaningful social relations – something especially vital in an ecosystem dominated by distrust, conspiracy, misinformation and the toxicity fuelled by technology and media within platform capitalism. In many ways, re-establishing trust – in everyday life, in institutions, in political organising – has become one of the most pressing challenges of our time.

YK: Yes, it's a real challenge, especially given the overwhelming speed at which these systems operate – far beyond what our current tools can match. But I believe that a slow, steady approach is essential for building *trust relations* – ones that are direct, communal and in-person. This isn't about nostalgia for outmoded relations; it is about reclaiming the tools already available to us within society, using them to foster real social connections. Through trust, we can create an alternative economy – one that supports political agency and collective action. It may be a slow process. Meanwhile the extreme speed of platform capitalism and dominant power structures ultimately leaves us isolated, seemingly without real spaces for movement and connection. We should not trust *any* platform of communication now, and that's precisely what we need to reclaim – finding ways to inhabit and take back communication strategies.

There are so many resources available – take independent online radio stations, for example. They're growing stronger, connecting people and operating as networks that generate and share knowledge. They may not reach billions like social media can, but they still serve a community, providing access to information when it's needed. These are the kinds of infrastructures we need

to build more of. It is ultimately about *practice* – about transforming our theories and concerns into tangible actions that allow us to move forward. [Radio Alhara can be listened to on **www.radioalhara.net**]

Look at the Palestine movement in Europe – all the volunteers and people doing the work of organising, even after long work hours, coming together, assembling and making things happen. Of course, political movements bring frustration and exhaustion, but we have to push through that and find ways to stay connected. We're working within the hopelessness, materialising hope through practice and struggle. It's absolutely what we need to do.

But to be honest, I am hopeless. I'm wary of the Hollywood hope that guarantees happy endings no matter what the reality is. The current situation and the way things are developing now don't leave much space for that kind of hope. Justice doesn't necessarily prevail at the end. Our struggle now is to make hope possible, to create conditions, frameworks, structures and tools for hope. This is our task now. I see how people are claiming back their political agency, claiming back what the state structure has taken away from us, our ability to see injustice and our ability to bring back justice to the people of the world. This is what Gaza and Palestine is bringing back in the world: the political agency of the people. If this is achieved, hope, I think, is possible.

TJD: Many thanks Yazan.

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