

# THE GRAFFITI OF THE INTIFADA

A BRIEF SURVEY

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Reading the writing on the wall has become a necessity for the Palestinians. All other channels being effectively closed to them, they are communicating their ideas and symbols through the time-honored if crude mode of graffiti. "We have no other way" is how the scribblers themselves explain their glyphs of sometimes aesthetic ingenuity executed on the shopfronts, telephone poles, cemetery walls, and houses by the multitude of factions all seeking to advance themselves and the Uprising: The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), The Palestine Liberation Organization (Fatah), the Communists. By the following day, they have usually been whitewashed or edited by soldiers or, less often, rival Palestinian groups. Although a largely neglected phenomenon, the graffiti of the Intifada represents a microcosm of the affirmation, denial, inspiration, fear, and will-to-power, in short, the struggles within the struggle called the *Intifada*.

Unlike much of the graffiti in the West, which can be classified under the rubric of what Dundes has appropriately termed "smearings" and which is personal in nature and private in execution and witness, the wall-writing of the Intifada is meant to be public and to function as something of a billboard. The graffiti is an internal code for the Palestinians themselves. Messages in English or in Hebrew exist but are anomalous. Despite (or because of) the risk to the artists, the graffiti is almost always found in well-travelled, highly visible locations. It is rare to find any but the crudest graffiti on less-populated thoroughfares which, being less frequented by the soldiers, would seem to provide the most logical canvas. An exception to this general rule are the abandoned houses and tumbledown ruins that are used as something like safe-houses by the *shabab*. The interior of one such house in Gaza's Sheikh Radwan neighborhood was completely

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"Is it art?" read one graffito written on an already overlaid wall in West Jerusalem. To answer that question, the graffiti of the Uprising can be compared with the art of the Uprising. Besides the criterion of duration, the two differ in other ways as well. Intifada art could be described as an amalgam of neo-primitivism and revolutionary surrealism, or "symbolic surrealism," in the words of the Gazan artist Muhammad Abu-Sitta. Its images are derived from a wider context than that of the graffitists: chains and yellow suns; veiled women on horses with fantastic flying manes, tails, feet; bullets and teargas canisters reading "Made in the USA"; palms displayed with prescient eyeballs in their centers gazing outwards. There are happy scenes: "A Palestinian Wedding," unhappy scenes: "The Palestinian Holocaust." In contrast, the graffiti of the Intifada are relatively simple, relying mostly upon language and a select few symbols to express social and political urgency.

Although most Palestinian graffiti consists of phrases and slogans, there are a number of images that appear repeatedly and can be seen as key symbols, substitutional signs, of the Palestinian Resistance: the clenched fist, the V-sign, the rifle, the Palestinian flag, and the map of All Palestine. The clenched fist and the V-sign are both internationally recognizable symbols of revolutionary defiance, but in the course of the Intifada, they have attained a specifically Palestinian intent. The fist is often used by the *shabab* to denote the popular armies, the underground military units that are referred to as the "striking hands" or "striking fists" of the Uprising. The fist symbolizes resolute, forceful, even violent action and is often depicted holding a gun, banner, or knife.

The V-sign of the Palestinians is close in spirit to the Churchillian victory symbol of World War II, with similar connotations of steadfastness and resolution in the face of adversity. For the Palestinians, who are



covered with spray-painted figures: fang-toothed spies with their faces crossed out, keffiyah-clad shabab, and seven-foot-tall Palestinians blasting Stars of David with kalashnikovs.

Intifada graffiti can be profitably compared to the gang graffiti that graces the subway-cars and walls of America's inner-cities. Both the "home-boys" of the gangs and the *shabab* of the Intifada are relatively powerless members of a wider society. The manner in which many members of America's minority groups can become "invisible" is well-documented. Similarly, the young Palestinians who write the graffiti of the Intifada suffer a related invisibility. Graffiti is a means for both the *shabab* and the home-boys to fight their transparency. For both populations, graffiti serves as a sort of existential fanfare trumpeting, "We exist!" Witness the ubiquitous phrases written by the shabab such as "Fatah passed by here" (*fataḥ marrat min huna*) and " Hamas is everywhere" (*ḥamās fī kull makān*), messages sometimes painted at breakneck heights. Although such promotions express the sense of power engendered among the shabab by the successes of the Intifada, their affect is also metaphysical.

What most sets the graffiti of the homeboys apart from that of the *shabab* is the latter's extreme impermanence which makes them historical almost before their time. A photograph of a graffiti of the Intifada is, literally, a copy without an original. This aura of transience lends the writing an aesthetic dimension--a tendency intensified not only by the beautiful forms of the Arabic language, but also by the very process of their being photographed. Many of the phrases and symbols used in the graffiti are embedded in Palestinian folklore and political culture. Their authors are agents of a purely social consensus and, thus, are anonymous and invisible, their palettes, analogically, flat.

of the few world leaders to insist on addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations with a pistol on his hip. It is worth noting that Arafat himself figures prominently in the pantheon of Palestinian icons. His name appears in many daubings, either as part of a greeting or pledge of loyalty, or as a talisman written on a doorway or wall. His presence in the form of posters, stencils, and graffiti is everywhere, floating high above the street and out of the reach of soldiers. He is pictured caressing children, holding bouquets of roses, or locked in embrace with the martyr-saint Abu-Jihad.

A typical variation on the gun motif is to write the name of a political faction in the shape of a rifle. This technique, which has its roots in traditional Arabic calligraphy, creates an internal equation between the object and the word, signalling the wish to collapse desire and praxis. Hamas employs this technique, painting its name in the shape of the Dome of the Rock,\* often combined with a fist with one finger raised towards heaven. The map of All Palestine, the final of the key symbols, is often portrayed in this fashion, with the map and the name of a Palestinian organization melded into the same image.

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\* A representation of The Dome of the Rock in Palestinian graffiti serves as an assertion of Islamic identity. It also functions as a proclamation of Muslim possession of the most contentious site in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Dome of the Rock is part of the site known to Muslims as *al-Haram al-Sharif* (The Noble Sanctuary), from which Muhammad ascended to heaven in his miraculous night journey, and to Jews as The Temple Mount, location of Solomon's temple. Since 1967, the Israelis have left the control of the site in the hands of the waqf. Still, al-Aqsa is often represented in Palestinian graffiti as being imperilled. This is particularly true of, though not limited to, the graffiti of Hamas. "Steady al-Aqsa Steady. The Islamic structure is almost complete" is an Hamas graffiti from Gaza. Hamas often closes its slogans with the signature "The Guardians of al-Aqsa." Radical Jewish groups, many based in the settlements in the Occupied Territories, also consider control of the site to be of utmost importance. In their view, the Islamic structures now situated on the Mount are a major obstacle to the coming of the Messiah. In the mid-eighties, extremists of "The Jewish Underground" attempted to blow up The Dome of the Rock.



forbidden all expressions of nationalism, indeed of identity, the V-for-victory sign serves to turn their bodies into banners.

The flag is recognized as a powerful symbol by Palestinians and Israelis alike. Indeed, it is the only representation declared illegal by the military government. The *shabab* go to absurd lengths to hang the flag from high-tension lines and the precarious summits of minarets and church domes. Villages that are only infrequently visited by the army will sport literally hundreds of flags, painted and woven, hanging or daubed, on every conceivable structure. Almost all Palestinian groups, secular and religious, use the flag or its colors frequently and prominently in their graffiti. For the Palestinians, the flag symbolizes the sovereignty they lack and for which they yearn. A common lament is that without the formal symbols of identity--a passport, an i.d. card, an anthem, a flag--they feel non-entities. Mahmud Darwish, drafter of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, speaks in his poem "The Passport" of being forced to "put the wound on show" when he travels as a stateless man. Many Palestinians are sure that these pieces of paper and cloth will anchor and protect them.

The flag is an image that transcends the split between the religious and the nationalist parties, as does the rifle, the pre-eminent symbol of Palestinian resistance. The rifle is the tool by which the sovereignty epitomized by the flag will be achieved and the shame of defeat erased. Indeed, the centrality of the rifle is emphasized by the sheer number of times it appears in the graffiti as a slogan--"Why Fear? Why Fear? The stone becomes a kalashnikov" (Laish al-khauf? Leish al-khauf? al-hajar sar kalašnakauf)--or as a stencil as in one of Fatah's shields.

Such is the the importance of the gun as a symbol that Yasser Arafat chairman of the PLO and paragon figure of the Palestinian Uprising, is one

stronger than the *mukhabarat* [the Arabic name for secret police]" (*naḥnu aqwā min al-mukhābarat*) or simply, "Palestine is Free" (*Filistīn ḥurra*), as if merely writing the messages could somehow bring them to pass.

Messages include warnings to collaborators and strikebreakers, quotations from the Qur'an, inspirations to continue "al-intifāḍa al-majīda" or "The Glorious Intifada," equations of the Star of David and the swastika, assertions of group identity, and swipes at the opposition. Much of the graffiti can be categorized as inspirational such as greetings and calls to unity. "In the month of the olive-picking a thousand greetings to our prisoners in the prison" (*fī šahar 'az-zeitūn alf taḥiya illa asrānā fī as-sujūn katā'ib Abu Jihad*) is one such graffito signed by The Group of Abu-Jihad of Fatah, a faction which takes its name from one of the most famous martyrs of the Intifada--Khalil al-Wazir, better known as *Abu-Jihad*, assassinated in 1988, reportedly by the Mossad. "Greetings to the warrior-sheikh Ahmad Yasin, the greatest symbol of the Intifada" (*taḥiya liš-šaikh al-mujāhid Aḥmad Yāsīn ramz al-intifāḍa al-akbar*) is a message posted by Hamas. "National Unity will remain a fortress in the face of the Fascist Occupation" (*al-waḥda al-waṭaniya satabaqā qal'a fī wajh al-iḥtilāl al-fāšī*) is a typical call for unity. "Our workers in the [West] Bank are requested to be in solidarity with our workers in the [Gaza] Strip" (*'ummālunā biḍ-ḍiffa muṭālabīn bitaḍāmūn ma' 'ummāl al-qiṭā'*) is a message signed by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Despite the many pleas for unity written on the walls, the tendency towards divisiveness and schism persists, a tendency which is also mirrored in the graffiti. The color of spray-paint used can be a vehicle for illustrating loyalty to a particular faction. The slogans of Hamas, the



The dramatic rebirth of the Jewish state after two thousand years of exile was the culmination of centuries of longing for many Jews. The Palestinians call it "The Catastrophe" (*an-nakba*). Hundreds of thousands of Arabs fled, were expelled, or otherwise lost their land in the wars that followed Israel's creation. The loss of their land in 1948 constitutes a defining tragedy for the Palestinians, whose sense of identity is irrevocably attached to the land and the hope that it will one day be theirs again. Thus it is not surprising that representations of the land figure prominently in Palestinian graffiti. Fatah, the largest faction of the PLO, makes wide use of the map, often incorporating it into its name. The PFLP also frequently incorporates the map into its displays, after transforming it into a flag or a weapon or as a backdrop for its slogans. The PFLP sometimes combines the three chief symbols--the flag, the gun, and the map--into a single chimerical shape with the map often painted in the distinctive checkered pattern of the *keffiyah*.

Despite the importance of these symbols, the great majority of the graffiti of the Intifada consists of slogans and written messages, and can perhaps be understood as manifestations of the Muslim concept of *al-maktub*, that is, the Written. Possibly stemming from a pre-Islamic belief that the written word was in itself imbued with a magic or power, the written is still much respected today. The word "Allah" is everywhere, brightly painted on the side of a bus or tucked away in some dark corner. While the practice is common in Islamic countries where "Allah" serves as a talisman bringing down the Divine Presence, it has become during the course of the Intifada a political act as well. Writing "Allah" on the wall functions as an assertion of identity and as a territorial marker.

Similar talismanic qualities can be discerned in assertions such as "Hamás does not fear bullets" (*ḥamās lā tahāb ar-raṣās*) or "We are

A typical "nationalist" slogan might read, "PLO is the best" or "Long life to the President of the State, Abu Amar" ('āša ra'īs ad-daula Abū 'Amār) or simply "Vietnam," a word often used to sum up what many call "The Situation." On murals painted on a wall in East Jerusalem, a Palestinian piper is depicted with a South American, an African, an American in blue jeans and baseball cap, and a Vietnamese dressed in sandals and paddy hat dancing across the globe to his tune.

There is a tendency among many Palestinians to hold a world-view which conceptualizes history as a battle. "Vietnam" is a succinct summary of this contest in which an aggressive and evil super-power is pitted against a small but noble people. A Gazan graffito which continues this theme reads, "The Israelis are not stronger than the Americans. The Palestinians are not weaker than the Vietnamese" (isrā'il laisat aqwā min amrikā wa al-filistīniūn laisū ad'af min al-vietnamiyîn). Such a *weltanschauung* is not in the least confined to the nationalist groups. The true struggle in this region, according to the Muslim Brothers, is not between Israelis and Palestinians, but rather between Islam and Zionism. Zionism, according to this view, is merely the modern name assumed by those evil forces which have opposed the will of God since creation.

In comparison to the slogans of the nationalists, those of Hamas achieve a powerful resonance through their usage of the language of Islam. The credo of Islam--lā illāh illā Allāh Muhammad Rasūl Allāh --is written on the walls against a backdrop of Islamic green or the equation "Hamas Islam" made. Hamas frequently employs the symbols of the Qur'an and the Dome of the Rock, sometimes in conjunction with Palestinian flags or knife-wielding fists. The movement also capitalizes on the idea of personal salvation as in the message, "He who desires money becomes a spy. He who desires salvation follows Hamas" (man arāda

militant underground wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, are often painted in the traditional holy color of Islam, green; Fatah often in black; the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Communist Party, most often in red.

Competition between religiously oriented groups like Hamas, whose name literally means "zeal," and nationalist groups such as the PLO is particularly keen. Before the outbreak of the Intifada, the competition between the Brothers and the PLO often led to violent clashes or "stones, clubs, and beatings," as one Palestinian put it. Since the Uprising, however, all groups have tried to refrain from using sticks and stones against each other for the sake of the Intifada. The infighting between the Brothers and the PLO is thus now largely confined to a graffiti war. One PLO piece of graffiti in a Gazan hospital read:

The Unified Leadership will remain  
the striking hand of the  
Palestine Liberation Movement.

(satabqā al-qiyāda al-muwaḥḥada  
al-yadd al-dāriba  
limunazzamat at-taḥrir al-filiṣṭīniya)

Directly facing it was a message from Hamas:

Islamic! Islamic!  
This is Hamas the High-Minded.  
Neither East nor West.  
Neither Communist nor Druze.  
We want an Islamic state!

(Islāmiya Islāmiya      haḍi hī ḥamās al-abiya  
lā šarqiya wa lā gharbiya      la šuyū'iya wa la durziya  
bidnā daula islāmiya!)



secular PFLP as is “The power of logic cannot be a substitute for the logic of power” and “The rifle cleared the way for the stone as the stone clears the way for the rifle” (*laqad mahhadat al-bundūqiya lilḥajar kamā mahhada al-hajar lilibundūqiya jabha ša‘biya*). The messages of the religious groups such as Hamas are similar: “Today we throw a stone . . . and tomorrow?” (*al-yaum narmī ḥajaran . . . wa ghadan?*) or “The destruction of Israel is a Qur’anic inevitability” (*tadmīr isrā’īl ḥatmiya qur’āniya*), a message recorded in a Gaza hospital.

The religious groups gain added clout through their usage of the term *jihād* or Holy War rather than the less-loaded expression *al-kifāḥ al-musallah* or “armed struggle” preferred by the nationalists. “The only language which talks with the Son of Zion is violence. So let’s deal with him in the language of Islamic *jihad*” (*al-lugha al-waḥīda allatī yatakallam bihā ibn ṣahyūn hiya al-‘unf falnata‘āmal ma‘hu bilughat al-jihād al-islāmī sarāyā al-jihād / al-ittiḥād al-islāmī*) is a slogan put forth by the Jihad Troops / the Islamic Union. “Islam is the solution and *jihad* is the way” (*al-islām huwa al-ḥall wa al-jihād huwa aṭ-ṭrāiq*), a message recorded in the Territories and Israel as well, is part of the motto of Hamas: “God is its goal and the Prophet its ideal and the Qur’an its constitution and *jihad* its way and death on the Path of God is its aspiration.” \*\*

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\*\* The motto is found in the *mithaq* or covenant of the movement, which was written upon the founding of the movement *harakat al-muqawamat al-islamiya* (Hamas) at the beginning of the Intifada. In the covenant, the Brothers capitalize upon the resonance of the holy language of the Qur’an and the *ahadith*. They gain added strength by employing an interesting mixture of traditional Arabic diatribe, revolutionary jargon, and the language of European anti-Semitism, much of which has been given an Islamic slant. This amalgam of styles can also be evidenced to a lesser degree in the graffiti of the movement.



al-fulūs falyusbeḥ jasūs man arāda al-khalās falyetba‘ ḥamās al-‘ankabūt al-aswad). Recorded near the West Bank town of Bir Zeit, the slogan was signed by The Black Spiders and was written in the florid Diwani script, a style usually reserved for poetry and *belles lettres*. In Gaza, where adherents of Hamas often function as the watchdogs of personal morality, the one-way sign--a fist and heaven-flung finger--is a territorial marker as well as a warning to all those who would stray from the path of Islam.

The nationalists--and the religious to a lesser extent--have attempted to forge a common front on the wall, which can be evidenced in slogans such as "Yes to forming a basis of cooperation between the Islamic and nationalist movements" (na'am lit-tansiq baina al-ḥarakāt al-islāmiya walwaṭaniya), a message posted by Fatah in the Old City of Jerusalem, and "Bullets don't make a distinction between a Muslim and a Christian" (ar-raṣāṣa lā tufarreḡ baina muslim wa masīḥī), a message put up by the Popular Front in Bethlehem. In Beit Hanina, the slogan "Abu Amar is our leader and Palestine is our home and Jerusalem is our capital" (Abū 'Amār qā'idnā wa filisṭīn dīretnā wa al-quḍs 'aṣimatnā faṭḥ) had been drawn in the form of a ship bearing two masts, one in the shape of an Islamic crescent, the other, a Christian cross.

The religious and the nationalists are united in their call for armed struggle. "I support any gun directed at the Zionists," as one young Gazan stated matter of factly. The call is often expressed by militant graffiti advocating an escalation of violence and often featuring tanks, kalashnikovs, molotov cocktails, and daggers. At Bir Zeit University, a tank on which *PLO* has been inscribed drives over a Star of David. "The rapacious fascist structure will not leave except through violence" (kiyān ighṭiṣābī fāṣī lan yarḥal illā bil'unf) is a slogan posted by the

**Yehudim ts'a [sic] lamilhamah neged haFalastinaim! Mavet laFalastinaim hateroristim!**). a message which was later emended with an accusation that the writer was "babbling" (**lekashkesh**).

The highways of the West Bank are dotted with Egged bus-stands which provide the canvas of choice for settlers who participate in the graffiti game. In a bus-stand near Ramallah had been written the slogan, "Ashaf [the Hebrew acronym for the PLO] lo yavor" or "Ashaf shall not pass," the aleph of Ashaf having been transformed into a swastika. Many of the messages are written by followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder and head of the militant Kach party, which was barred from the Knesset in 1988 for its racist platform. Kach's symbol--a clenched fist inside of the Star of David--and the phrase "Death to the Arabs!" (**Mavet la'aravim**) are typical of the movement's graffiti. Settlers often come at night to Arab towns to put up territorial markers in the form of the names of nearby settlements or the refrain "**Am Yisrael hai!**" or "The nation of Israel lives!" on the walls of local houses.

Swastikas are also found as graffiti throughout the Occupied Territories. They adorn walls, trashcans, and bathrooms, often connected by an equals sign with the word *Israel*. In Gaza, a swastika had been crudely carved by a shabab into his own arm. By drawing upon Nazi propaganda, the shabab have chosen the most powerful and the most wounding symbols available.

The escalating hatred can also be evidenced in the slogans scrawled on virtually every trashbin in the Occupied Territories. Garbage-can insults are often quite basic, reading "Shamir" [Prime Minister of Israel] or "Shamir's house," "Shalom" [Heb., peace], or simply "Israel." A related practice is to write "Israel" or to draw the Star of David on roads to be desecrated by feet and passing cars.

In contrast to the large amount of Palestinian-executed graffiti, messages by Israeli-Jews are rare. Unlike their Palestinian contemporaries, Jews have many means of expressing all but the most radical of messages. Jewish graffiti is thus almost always the product of a marginal sector of Israeli society, the extreme right or left--or of the soldiers who patrol the streets of East Jerusalem and the Territories. The sentiments expressed in these graffiti have long existed in parts of Israeli Jewish society. With the escalation of the Intifada, however, their expression on the walls has become more widespread.

A not uncommon stencil features a head--or sometimes full figure--and stick poised above it with the caption, "Mi yemalel?" or "Who is speaking out?" as in "Who is speaking out against violence to the Palestinians?" This graffiti is given added ironic punch as "Mi yemalel?" is taken from a popular Hannukah song which begins, "Who will tell of the heroes of Israel?" On the busy corner of Ben Yehuda and King George streets, that graffiti has been edited by crossing out the words, "Who is speaking out?" and by adding *USA* next to the stick and *Israel* next to the beaten figure. On Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street had been written the common rallying cry of the Israeli left, "Down with the Occupation" (*dai lakibbush*), a slogan later reinforced with "It is not good to die in support of destruction, sowing blood and not seed," a twist on the mythic last words of Trumpeldor, "Never mind, it is good to die for your country."

In extreme contrast are the slogans of the far right, who, generally, resort to the spraycan more than do their leftist counterparts, with messages like "Death to [Faisal] Hussein" (*Mavet laHusseini*) or: "T.N.T. [Terror Against Terror] has returned. The Jews will go out to war against the Palestinians! Death to the Palestinian terrorists!" (*T.N.T. hazar.*



Palestinians regard "collaborators" ( 'umalā' ) as their greatest enemies. Over the years, the Israeli *mukhabarat* has managed through promises, threats, or combinations of the two to persuade many Arabs--some say thousands--to be informers. Palestinians insist that these collaborators, who are often drawn from the outcasts of society, have done tremendous damage. "Collaborator" has now become something of an umbrella-term which includes backsliders in the faith, drug-dealers, heretics, and social misfits of all colors. They are murdered on the order of about one every other day in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. As of today, there have been well over a thousand attacks of various sorts directed against traitors, real and imagined.

The walls of al-Ahli hospital in Gaza city recently bore witness to a controversy over the fate of an accused collaborator, Jihad al-Qawasme. The first graffito stated, "Fatah loathes the attack on Brother Jihad al-Qawasme, and will punish all those who attack innocent people" (fatḥ tudīn al-i'tidā' 'alā al-akh Jihād al-Qawāsme). Fatah apparently had a change of heart or had received new information for the original message was crossed out and replaced with, "Fatah will have nothing to do with the traitor Jihad al-Qawasme" (fatḥ laisa laha 'alāqa ma' al-'amīl Jihād al-Qawāsme). If an accused collaborator can transform the dispute from one of politics into a family feud, he can perhaps stave off the punishment meted out to traitors. Al-Qawasme apparently tried to do just that, for a few days later new graffiti appeared which read, "To the collaborator Jihad al-Qawasme. If you portray your beating as a family problem, we will sentence you to death" (ilā al-'amīl Jihād al-Qawāsme i'ā ḥawwalta 'amaliyat rad'ak ilā muškila 'ā'iliya qasaman la nunafiḍḍ bika 'uqūbat al-e'dām). The Unified Leadership also posted this message to any would-be allies of of the



Another popular means of denigration is to present the opposition as animals. From East Jerusalem to the Gaza Strip, Shamir is commonly represented as a donkey. "Donkey" in Arabic is *himar*, and the play on words is a favorite amongst the shabab. Rabin [ex-Defense Minister] is another popular target of bestialization. Near New Gate in Jerusalem, he is depicted as a monkey next to the words, "All Communists will be killed" (*sayuqṭal kull ṣuyū'i*). Israel's chunky ex-general Ariel Sharon is often portrayed as an elephant. One of the most interesting slogans to be found is on the crowded walls of Jiffna, "Let's make the Day of the Land a spur for struggling with rocks and molotovs. We will face the herd of settlers" (*liyakūn yaum al-arḍ ḥāfizan lilkiḥāḥ bilḥijārā wa al-molotof nataṣadda liquṭ'ān al-mustauḥinīn qāf wāw mīm*). The writer has chosen to use the word *qutan* to refer to the settlers, a word which is used exclusively to refer to animals.

Warnings and threats constitute another genre of Palestinian graffiti. In Ramallah, this warning signed by The Abu-Jihad Brigades of Fatah was found on the walls of the Christian cemetery: "We will clean our land from the pollution of the collaborators. Woe! Woe to the collaborators!" (*sanunazif arḍunā min danas al-'umalā' al-wail! al-wail lil-'umalā'!*) is a not uncommon warning placed on storefronts in the Jerusalem *suq* or marketplace. Another variation on the same theme is "To every house, a door. To every collaborator, a reckoning" (*likull bait bāb wa likull 'amīl ḥisāb*), a message painted on the Christmas Hotel in East Jerusalem. Oftentimes, "collaborators" and persons suspected of immoral conduct are addressed by name, as in this message written on a wall in Gaza, "To Ahmad Shukri, we say your time of evil will not last long" (*li Aḥmad Ṣukrī naqūl 'umr aḥ-ḥulm lan yaṭul*).

Muhammad al-Khawaja" (fakhrunā 'an namūt wa naşūn sharafnā kamā fa'ala ar-rafiq Muhammad al-Khawaja jabha şa'bia). Like many of the sentiments expressed in Palestinian wall-writing, the scramble for the status of martyr has its roots in traditional Islamic culture. Since the time of Muhammad, whose greatest wish, it is written, was to die a martyr, those who have died fighting "on the path of God" have been assured a place in heaven and a name of glory for themselves on earth. This sentiment finds expression even in the slogans of a secular group like the PFLP, # as in this message recorded in Ramallah: "Greetings to Ahmad Kilani, the Martyr of the Proletariat, on his way we are going" (taḥiya illā Aḥmad al-Kilāni şahīd aḷ-ḷabaqa al-'amila wa 'alā darbihi sâ'irūn).

"On his way we are going": It is the *mise-en-scene* which perhaps more than any other spurs the children on to their deaths--deaths which are then written in the great Book of the *Shahid* as messages to the living, byproducts in the unfolding of a drama which most Palestinians see as almost cosmic in scope.

# Although the term *shahid* is in its inception a religious one, it has entered the language of secular Palestinian nationalism. Some members of Hamas differentiate between *shahid fi sabil Allah*, martyr on the path of God, and *shahid al-ard*, martyr of the land. A Muslim, they insist, can be both, a Christian only the latter.

accused. "We will put anyone who aligns himself with the garbage Jihad al-Qawasme under the telescope of the revolutionary security committee" (qaum [qāf wāw mīm] sataḍa' kull man yaqif bijaneb al-kaḍer Jihād al-Qawāsme tahta min zār al-amn aḡ-ṭaurī).

Commemoration is another primary motivation behind the writing on the walls. Common are the many written memorials to Palestinians killed during the Intifada. Referred to by the Islamic term *shahid* or martyr, their faces stare off of the walls on solemn posters. The *shahid* holds a high place in Palestinian society as one who gives his life in the "Holy Struggle" (*jihād*) "on the path of Allah" (*fī sabīl allāh*) for a "national homeland" (*al-waṭan al-qaumi*).

"We welcome you to heaven, O Amjad" (*ḥāni'an laka al-janna yā Amjad as-sawā'id ar-rāmiya ḥamās*),<sup>†</sup> a slogan recorded in el-Bireh, expresses the idea of immortality gained through sacrifice as does the graffito: "In Paradise forever, O Nasser, God willing" (*fī jinān al-khuld yā Nassir in šā'a Allāh*). Interestingly, the *shahid* is often addressed as if still alive, as in "Greetings to the martyr Muhammad al-Khawaja. First martyr of the Zionist Interrogation Cells" (*taḥiya lišahīd, Muhammed al-Khawaja awwal šahīd fī aqbiya at-taḥqīq aḡ-ṣahyūniya jabha ša'bia*). Nearby was another graffito, also put up by the PFLP, urging others to follow in the footsteps of the *shahid*: "We are proud to die and save our honor like our comrade

<sup>†</sup>Through his death, the *shahid* gains immortality and, importantly, sets an example for others to follow. A popular Intifada chant is:

O Mother, my religion called me to *jihad* and sacrifice.  
 O Mother, I am marching towards immortality without hesitation.  
 O Mother, do not cry if I am shot down.  
 Death does not frighten me, my wish is to be a *shahid*.



Since the advent of the Intifada, the V-for-victory sign has served the function of turning the body into a banner. It is an ubiquitous symbol found throughout Israel and the Territories. Here, it has been painted on the walls of a monastery. *Fatah* has been inscribed on the palm. Christian Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem.





Graffiti is often erased or edited by rival Palestinian groups or by passing patrols. This graffiti, originally a Palestinian flag, was covered up by soldiers and replaced by a Star of David and the slogan, "Arabs out." It was subsequently re-emended by a Palestinian who scrawled a large "No" in the center of the Star. Old City, Jerusalem.



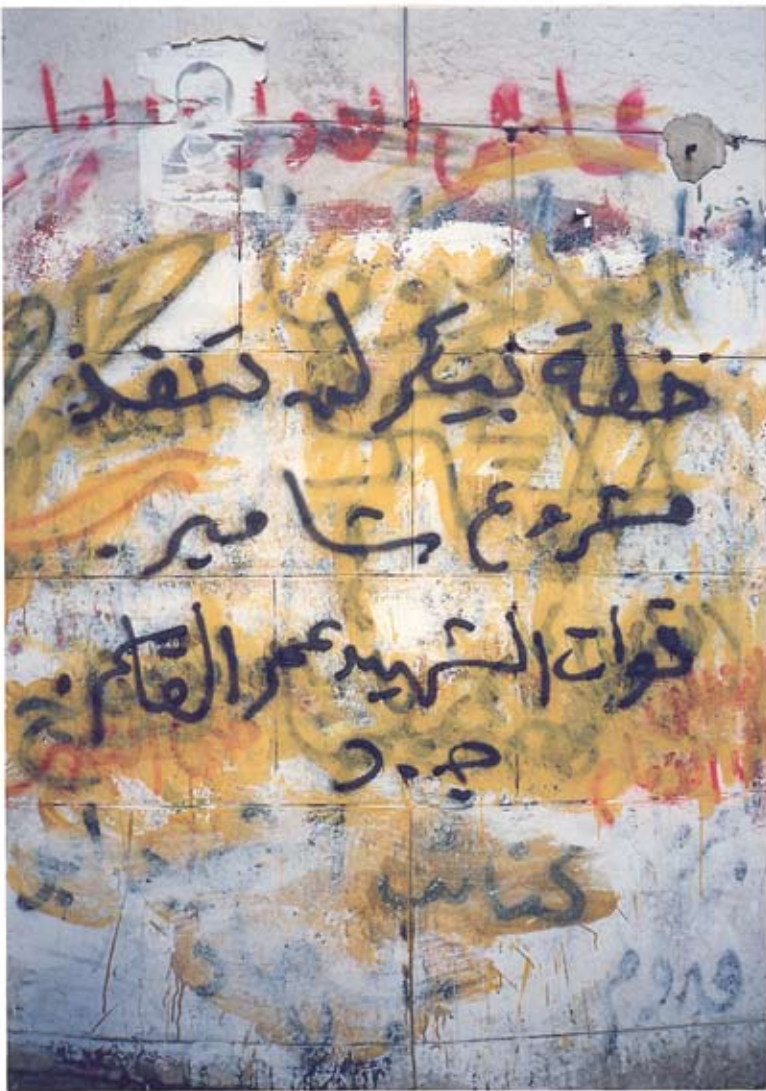
The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has combined the three chief symbols of the Palestinian Uprising--the flag, the gun, and the map--into a single chimerical shape. Gaza City, The Gaza Strip.



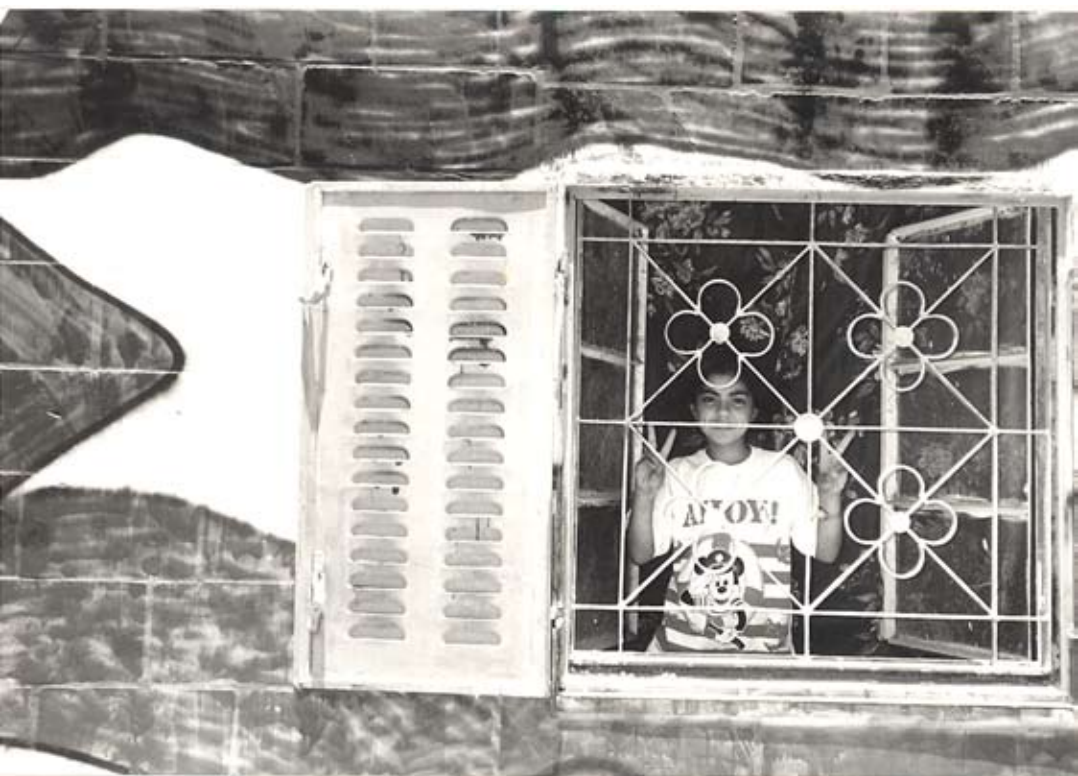
A detail of a piece of Hamas graffiti depicts a fist emerging from The Dome of the Rock inside of a map of Palestine. Hamas often employs symbols in its graffiti which possess both Islamic and Palestinian resonance. Beit Hanina, Jerusalem.







“The Baker plan will not save Shamir’s project. The Force of the Martyr Omar al-Qassem, The Democratic Front “ (khuṭṭa Baikar lan tunfiḍa mašrū‘ Šamīr quwāt aš-šahīd ‘Omar al-Qassem jīm dāl). Much of the graffiti of the Intifada serves a quite pragmatic purpose, something like a billboard of the uprising. Through the writing on the walls, strike-days are announced, key points from leaflets are posted, and various factions announce their position on issues of moment. Ramallah, The West Bank.



Almost all Palestinian groups, both secular and religious, use the flag or its colors frequently and prominently in their graffiti. Here, a Palestinian flag has been painted on the front of a house. Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem.





Yasser Arafat, leader of Fatah, chairman of the PLO and president of the yet-to-be-realized state of Palestine, has himself become a symbol and is conspicuous in the pantheon of Palestinian icons. His presence is everywhere, floating high above the street and out of the reach of soldiers. He is pictured caressing children, holding bouquets of roses, or locked in embrace with the martyr-saint Abu-Jihad. Ramallah, The West Bank.



The one-way sign is depicted on a fence. Hugging the knuckles and the raised finger is the inscription "Allah." The one-way sign with the index finger flung heavenwards is a symbol favored by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Gaza City, The Gaza Strip.



The acronym for al-jabha aš-ša'bia li taḥrīr al-filīṣṭīn, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, is drawn on a storefront in the shape of a Kalashnikov rifle (top figure), which is pointed at a map of All Palestine and is shown as coming from the left through Jordan--both to emphasize the PFLP's leftist orientation and their erstwhile motto that the liberation of Palestine will come only through the "liberation" of Jordan. The bottom figure is a stylized acronym--lām mīm šīn --for al-lijān al-muqāwama aš-ša'bia, the Popular Resistance Leagues. The organization's symbol is a fist, as they consider themselves one of the strike forces of the Intifada. Khan az-Zeit, Old City, Jerusalem.

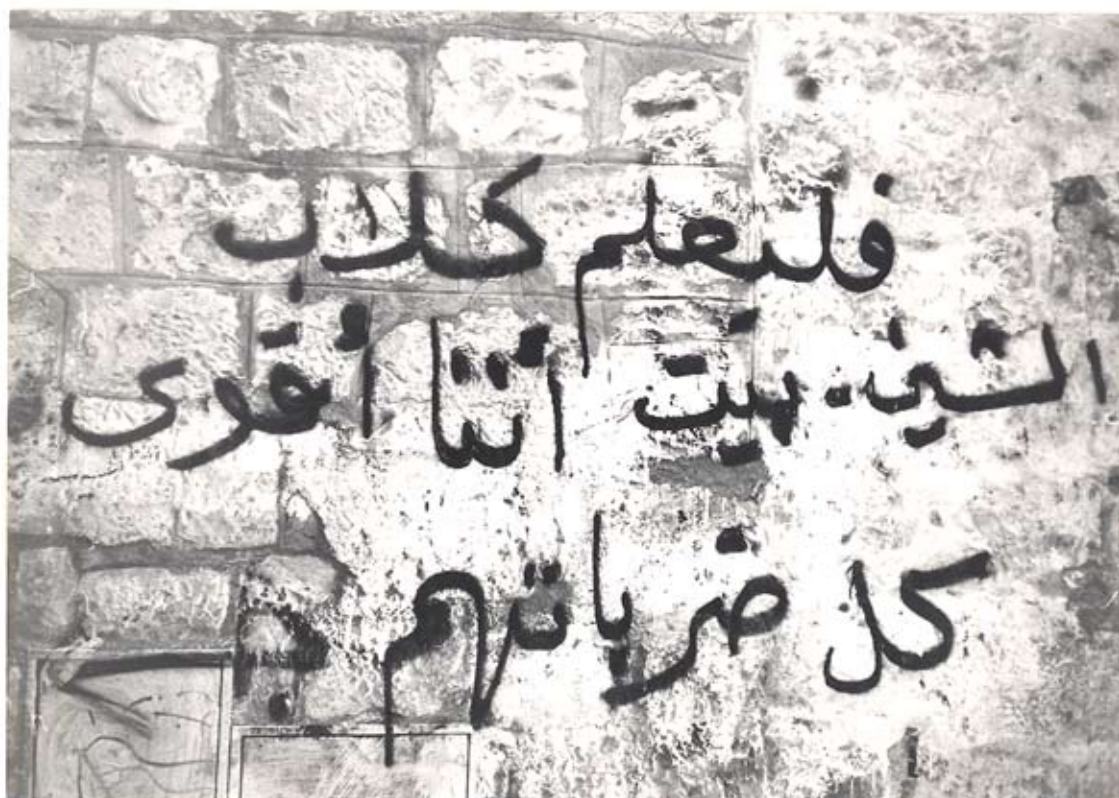




A typical variation on the gun motif is to write the name of a political faction, here Fatah, in the shape of a rifle. This practice, which has its roots in traditional Arabic calligraphy, creates an internal equation between the object and the word. In Arabic, *fatah* means “The Opening” and is a term with rich religious and historical associations for Muslims. Bir Zeit, The West Bank.



**“Medinat Yehudah” or “The State of Judea” is a political movement founded in early 1989 by followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane, with the aim of occupying any land vacated by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza and establishing a militant Jewish state. “Basad,” an abbreviation of “ba siata dashmaya,” “With the Help of God,” is written in Aramaic in the right-hand corner. Between Nablus and Ramallah, The West Bank.**



“The dogs of the Shin Bet [Israeli secret police] must know that we are stronger than all their beatings. J.Sh. [Popular Front (for the Liberation of Palestine)]”  
(felya‘lam kilāb aš-šīn-beit innanā aqwā [min] kull ḡarabātihim jīm.šīm). Old City, Jerusalem.





“Hamas. Our land is Islamic this is the essence”  
(hamās arḍanā islāmiya haḍa hiya al-  
huwiya). Hamas and other like-minded Islamic  
groups insist that the land of Palestine-Israel is al-arḍ  
al-muqaddas or Holy Land and, as such, may never be  
relinquished. Muslim Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem.



“Remember the glorious Day of the Land” (*dīkrā yom al-arḍ al-majīd*). The Day of the Land is commemorated by Israeli-Arabs in memory of six people killed during protests against the confiscation of Arab land in the Galilee. It has become a rallying point for many Arab political groups in Israel, particularly the more radical movements such as the Sons of the Village. In recent years, the Day of the Land has been celebrated in the West Bank and Gaza as a symbol of solidarity between Palestinians inside and outside of the Green Line. Jiffna, The West Bank.



“ Hamas. The revolution will not be stepped on” (ḥamās at-ṭaura lan tudās). This graffiti is notable for its use of the term “revolution,” a word often eschewed by the Islamic groups such as Hamas as being in inception un-religious and even heretical. Muslim Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem.

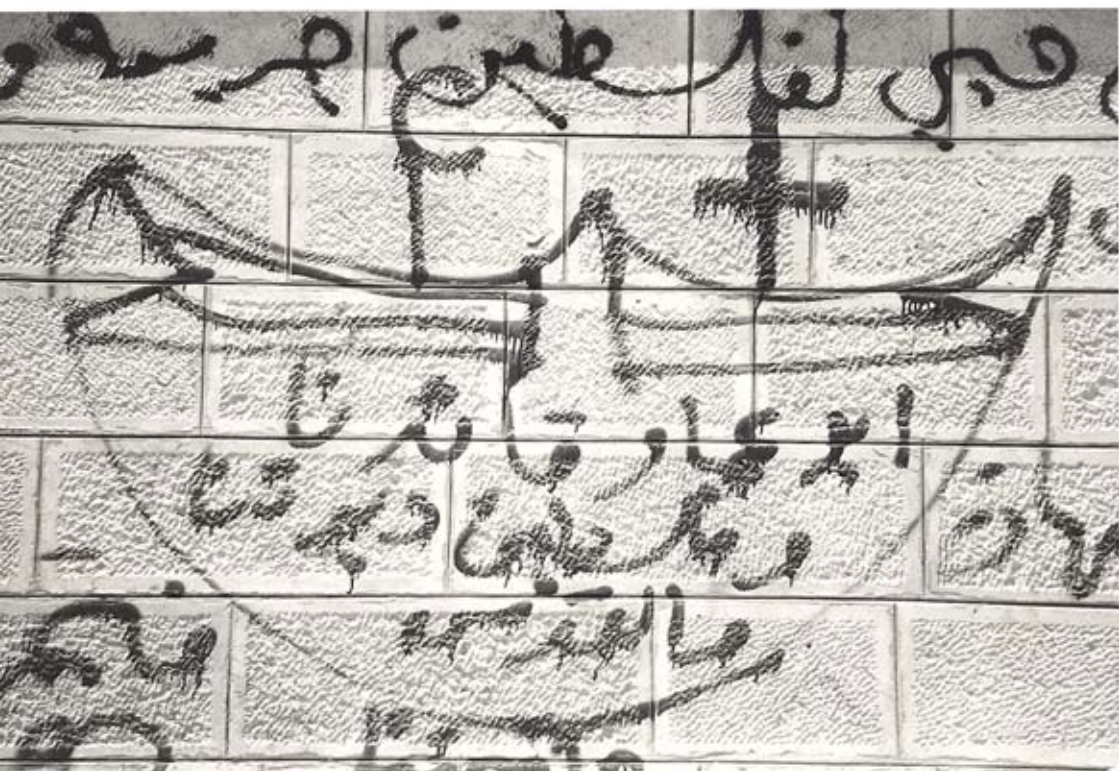




On a gas pump in Ramallah, an announcement of the first anniversary of the martyrdom of Ahmad Kilani has been posted. The martyr or shahid holds a high place in Palestinian society as one who gives his life in the "Holy Struggle" "for the sake of Allah" and a "national homeland." Ramallah, The West Bank.



The Dome of the Rock and a one-way sign are painted over a map of Palestine. The Dome of the Rock and the one-way sign (to heaven) are used almost exclusively in the graffiti of the religious movements, particularly Hamas. In this graffiti, one sees again the melding of the word and the object. The Dome of the Rock has been constructed from the (Arabic) letters of Hamas. The slogan to the left of the mosque reads, "junūd ḥamās lilaqṣā ḥarās," "The troops of Hamas are the guardians of al-Aqsa." ar-Ram, The West Bank.



“Abu Amar is our leader and Palestine is our home and Jerusalem is our capital” (Abū ‘Amār qā'idnā wa filasṭīn diyaratnā wa al-quḍs 'āṣimatnā fataḥ). The slogan has been drawn in the form of a ship bearing two masts, one in the shape of an Islamic crescent, the other, a Christian cross. Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem.