

ZY



Tafline Laylin 30/11/2017

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Because every cause needs a strong identity.

Companies have logos — and so should resistance movements. Or so Palestinian artist Vladimir Tamari and an anonymous friend decided one day in Beirut in 1969, two years after **Israel occupied Palestine** in the Arab-Israeli war. Tamari, who spent 47 years in Japan with his wife and children, penned a long post on his personal website in August 2016, describing in detail the birth of the logo for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — a black arrow and green dot pointing to a red map of Palestine, the place to which exiled Palestinians long to return. Tamari died in August this year, and the truth of the logo's origins came close to being buried with him.

Before Tamari's post, it was commonly believed across the Arab world that author Ghassan Kanafani, then spokesperson for the PFLP, had designed the logo. Kassem Hawl, a renowned Iraqi filmmaker who made a film based on Kanafani's short story "Return to Haifa," recalls asking his friend decades ago about the design's history. "He told me a short story that one day he saw a photograph on the wall in the city [maybe Gaza]," Hawl says over Skype. "It was a map of Palestine that some young person had drawn." Kanafani described an arrow pointing toward the map, to which he added the "J" in Arabic (for *Jabha*, or front). Only then was the logo passed on to Vladimir Tamari, who finessed its color and final shape, according to Hawl. "This is the story as Ghassan Kanafani told it to me."

THE LOGO HELPS KEEP ALIVE THE SPIRIT AND HOPE OF LIBERATION, REMINDING US OF THE NECESSITY OF REGAINING OUR OWN HOMELAND.

VLADIMIR TAMARI, PALESTINIAN ARTIST

Kanafani was assassinated in 1972 — it is presumed by Israel — so the story can't be verified with him. And when asked for confirmation of the logo's origins, a PFLP spokesperson responded in Arabic, asking in a joking manner what it would cost to change it. But Tamari's notes are so detailed, complete with early sketches, there's every reason to believe he is the true creator of this lasting symbol of Palestinian resistance.

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CHECK IT OUT

"[We] were wondering why the resistance did not have an effective logo or symbol, so we started designing one," Tamari wrote on his website. "We sketched and played with various ideas, using the Arabic letter 'Fa' for *Falastin* (Palestine), adding an arrow to the word *Fath* — Yasser Arafat's group — and finally adding a map of Palestine." He said they felt the resulting symbol was dramatic enough to send to the Palestine Liberation Organization for consideration. They did, but never heard back. "They already had a bureaucratic-looking logo designed by my friend, the Palestinian painter Ismail Shammout," Tamari wrote.



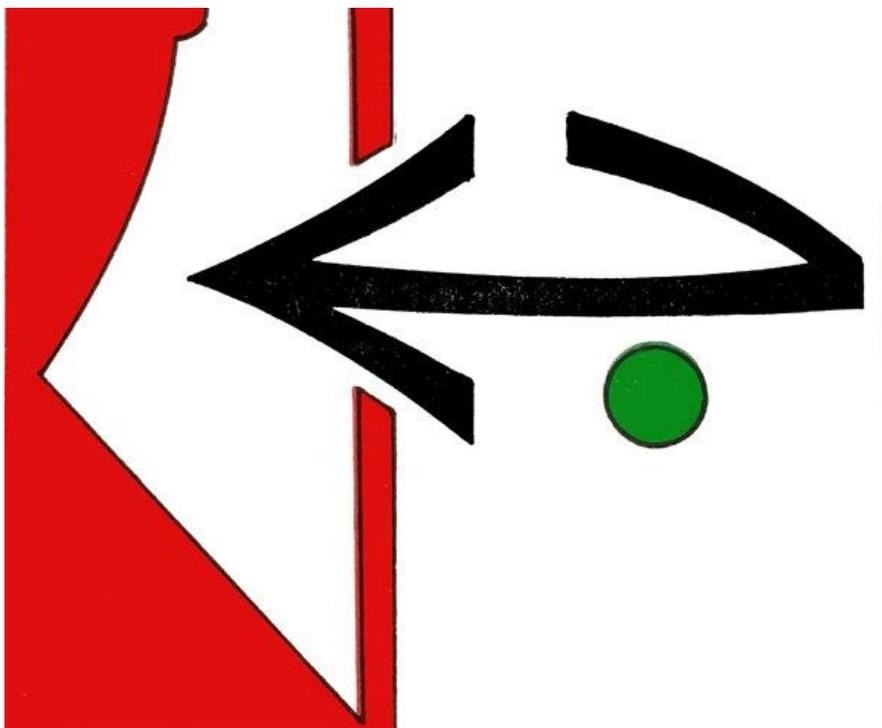
Palestinian artist Vladimir Tamari made this preliminary sketch in 1969 for the logo of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

SOURCE [TAFILINE LAYLIN/OZY](#)

In the meantime, he said, he was helping artist Mona Saudi produce her book *In Time of War: Children Testify: Drawings by Palestinian Children*, about children from the Baq'aa refugee camp in Jordan. "Mona had contacts with the PFLP, and had the idea to change the 'Fa' of the logo to the Arabic letter 'Jeem' for *Jabha*, i.e., front." She then presented the idea to Kanafani. (OZY could not reach Saudi for comment.) As Tamari tells it, "Kanafani ... was also a gifted amateur artist, and he immediately understood the impact of the symbol and had it adopted by the group, after changing the square format to a circle." It has since been adopted in and outside of Palestine on posters, flags and wall graffiti, though the colors have been reduced to red and white.

Despite his enduring contribution to the PFLP, Tamari in no way condoned the group's targeting of innocent civilians in Palestine's name. The U.S. Department of State officially listed the PFLP as a **terrorist** organization on Oct. 8, 1997, following a series of plane hijackings and suicide bombings. "In a spirit of disillusionment I left Beirut for good," he wrote, "and emigrated to Japan, where I limited my activities for **Palestine** to designing posters, giving talks and the like, devoting myself to my art and inventions."





Tamari's final version.

SOURCE [TAFLINE LAYLIN/OZY](#)

For its part, the PFLP is unequivocal about its condemnation of Israel, which the logo does well to convey. In *Branding Terror: The Logotypes and Iconography of Insurgent Groups and Terrorist Organizations*, Artur Beifuss and Francesco Trevini Bellini write, "The red color of the PFLP logo and flag hints at the group's Marxist-inspired ideology. ... Red also symbolizes bloodshed and war, and indicates the PFLP's commitment to armed struggle in order to realize its aims." Beifuss and Bellini suggest the design also acknowledges support from "non-Palestinian insurgent groups, such as the German left-wing guerrilla group Rote Armee Fraktion."

Asked to comment on the logo, the Egyptian graffiti artist who works under the pseudonym Ganzeer ("bicycle chain") and whose work first achieved widespread acclaim after the 2011 Egyptian revolution, says it's adequate. "Vladimir's logo is conceptually sound," he tells OZY, "but ... can be improved upon aesthetically to achieve the kind of geometric harmony that makes a good logo truly powerful."

If not entirely muscular, at least its symbolism remains unwavering, according to Tamari. "The logo helps keep alive the spirit and hope of liberation, reminding us of the necessity of regaining our own homeland," he wrote.

THE DAILY DOSE NOV 30 2017

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