

THE BIRTH OF THE LOGO FOR THE POPULAR FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE

Vladimir Tamari - August 2016, Tokyo.

THE YEAR 1969, BEIRUT, LEBANON

Following the overwhelming Arab defeat and the total occupation of Palestine, including Jerusalem in the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967, the Palestinians countered with a guerrilla war - the Resistance. I was in Beirut at the time, cut off from home and family, and working for UNRWA the United Nations Agency to support Palestinian refugees in the audio visual section. When our **our film group went to the Jordan river to film the stream of Palestinian refugees fleeing the war**, I tried entering Palestine. I said "Salam" (Peace) to the lone Israeli soldier posted there on the bridge. He replied smiling "Shalom" but with his gun prevented my return to Jerusalem, my birthplace, and to Ramallah my home. Later in Beirut I worked in the UNRWA-UNESCO Institute of education as an illustrator.

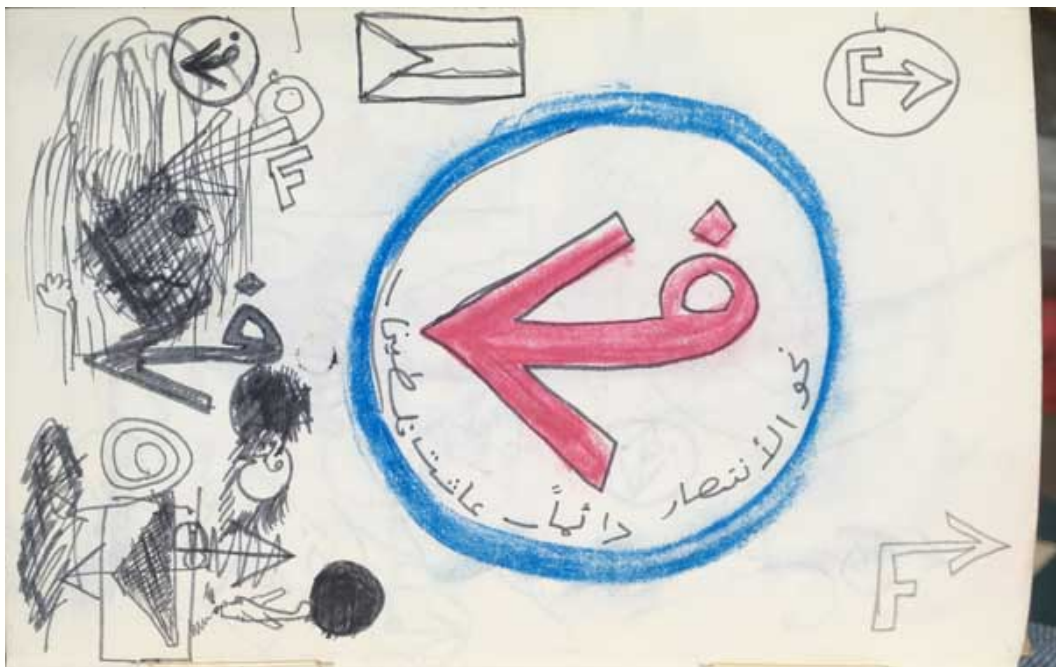
One day in early 1969 my friend X (who prefers anonymity) and I were wondering why the Resistance did not have an effective logo or symbol so we started designing one. This was a personal initiative as neither of us was or became members of any of the organizations carrying on the fight against the Israeli occupation of our beloved homeland. 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. The Fa + Arrow + Map made a simple dynamic symbol and I felt it was good enough to finalize and send to the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) as a logo suggestion. I have no idea if my covering letter and designs ever reached the poet Kamal Nasir, the spokesman of the PLO, or whether some committee there rejected a change (they already had a bureaucratic-looking logo designed by my friend the Palestinian painter Ismail Shammout. The military wing of the PLO had its own symbol, designed by the Syrian painter Nazir Nab'aa.)

Meanwhile as a graphic designer and typographer I was helping the Jordanian sculptor and poetess Mona Saudi produce her book *In Time of War Children Testify* of drawings and anecdotes by Palestinian Refugee children from Baq'aa refugee camp in Jordan (Published in 1970 in Beirut jointly by the PFLP and *Mawaqif*, the journal of the Syrian poet Adonis, which Mona co-edited). I scripted the entire text of the book by hand using an early version of my **AlQuds font**. 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. This I implemented using the distinctive curved Jeem from *AlQuds*. Mona took the logo suggestion to Ghassan Kanafani, the spokesman for the PFLP. Kanafani the famed Palestinian novelist, 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. People in the movement liked the logo and the years and decades passed as it appeared in all sorts of posters, flags, wall graffiti everywhere in and outside Palestine.

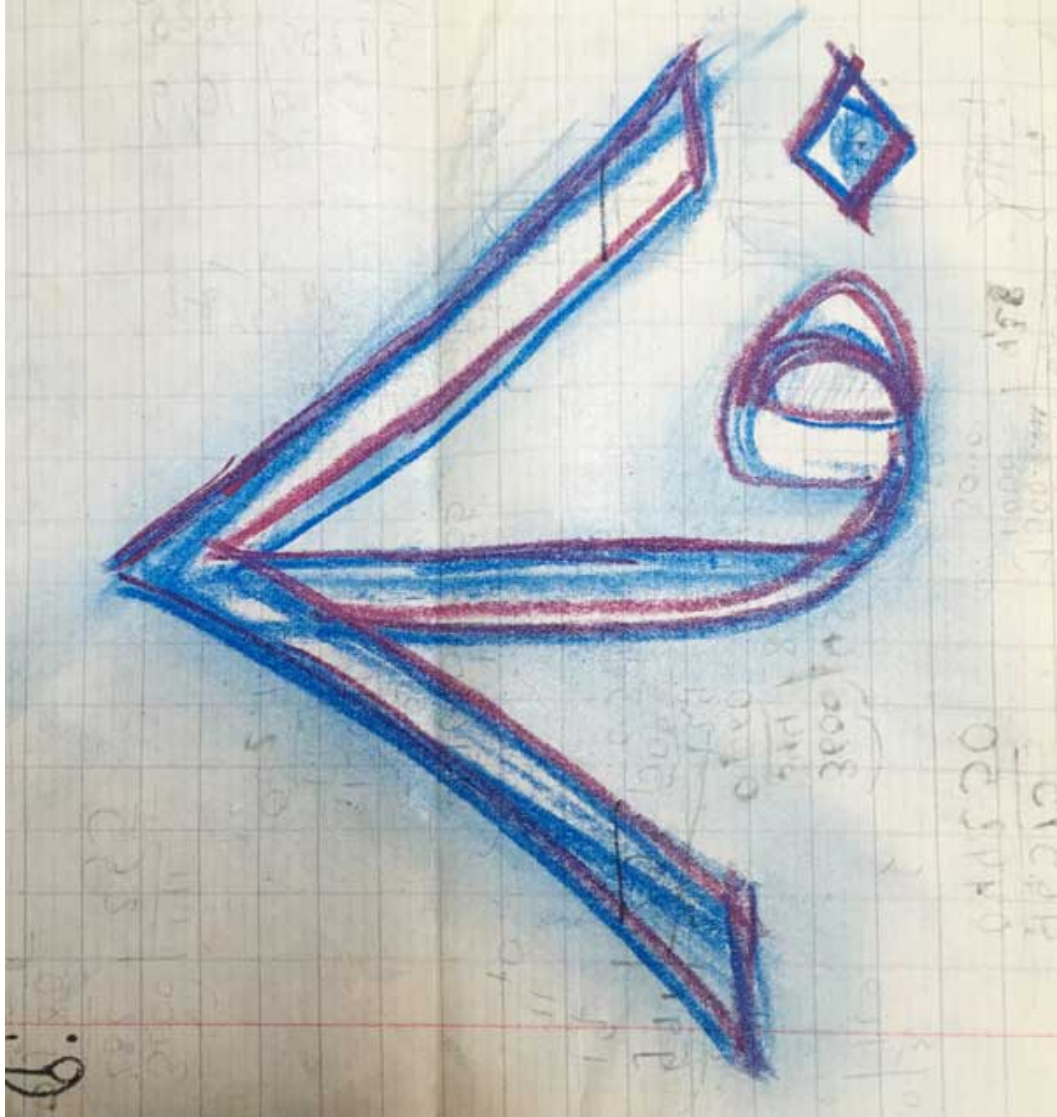
Needless to say, my having designed the logo did not mean I condoned what I soon felt were some serious mistakes made in the name of Palestine, such as the targeting of innocent civilians. In a spirit of disillusionment I left Beirut for good, and emigrated to Japan where I limited my activities for Palestine to **designing posters**, giving talks, and the like, devoting myself to my art and inventions. I had met both Kamal Nasir (the cousin of my brother-in-law) and Ghassan Kanafani. Once in Ramallah Kamal with his wonderful spirit, urged me to follow my dreams whatever the cost. Both he and Ghassan were assassinated by Israeli agents in Beirut, in 1972 and 1973 respectively. Their political work ended with their deaths, but their great novels and poems live on as a treasured part of the Palestinian cultural heritage. In 1976 my father obtained a permit to allow me and my family to visit him my mother and sisters in Ramallah under Israeli occupation. On the bridge on the Jordan River I was arrested by the Israelis and detained in Jerusalem for three days, where I was questioned about my abovementioned activities then released. After three months I was not allowed to renew the permit to be in my own my homeland and had to return to Tokyo.



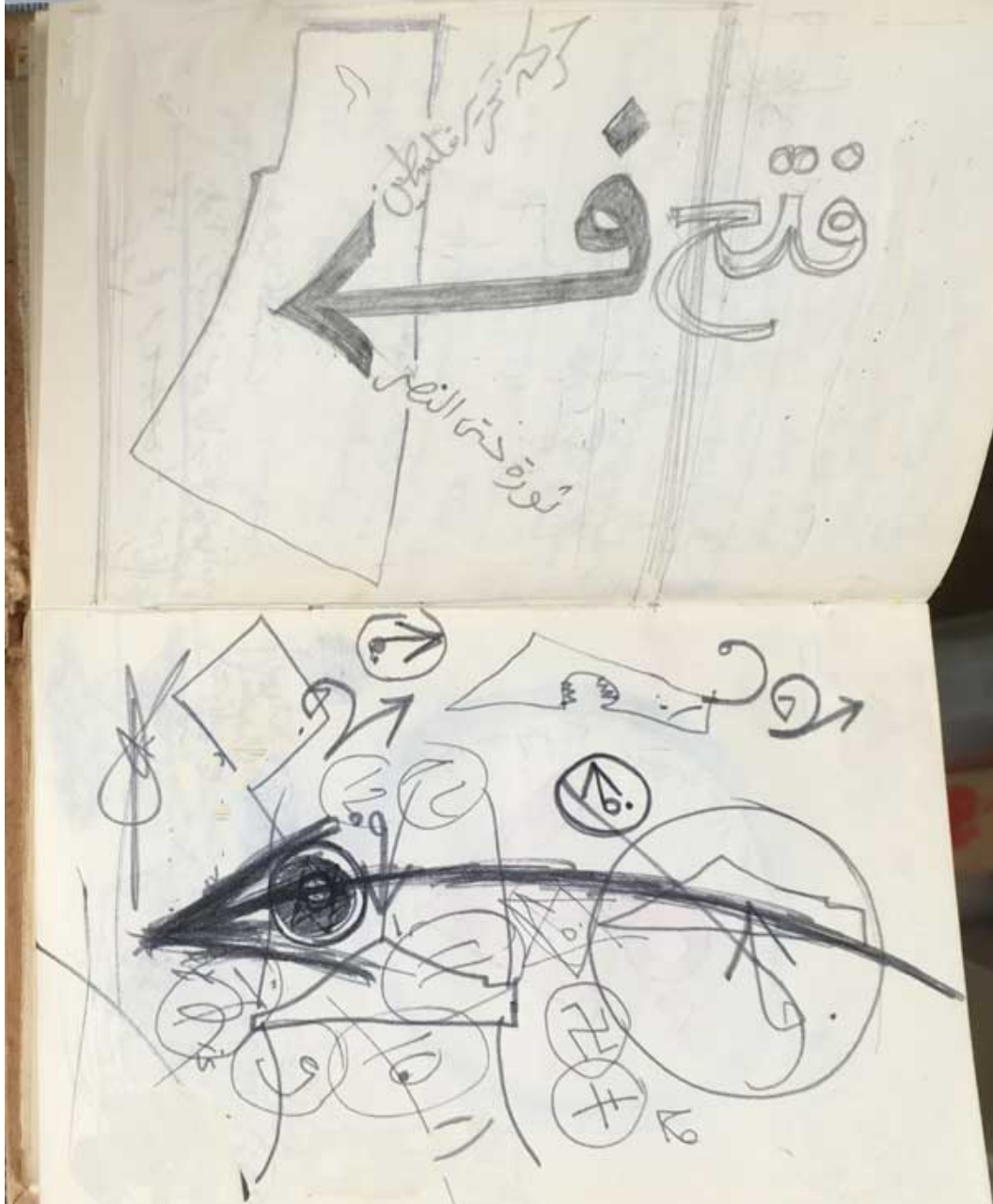
The Arabic word Fath (Palestine Liberation Movement) with the arrow I designed. Feb 1969



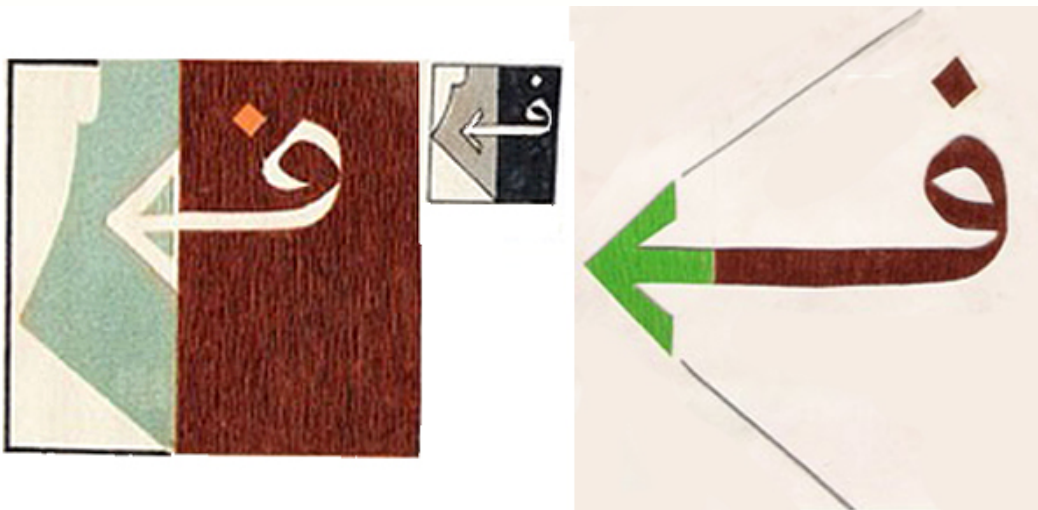
X abbreviated the Fath to an 'F' with an Arrow, adding in Arabic "Towards Victory Always - Long Live Palestine!"



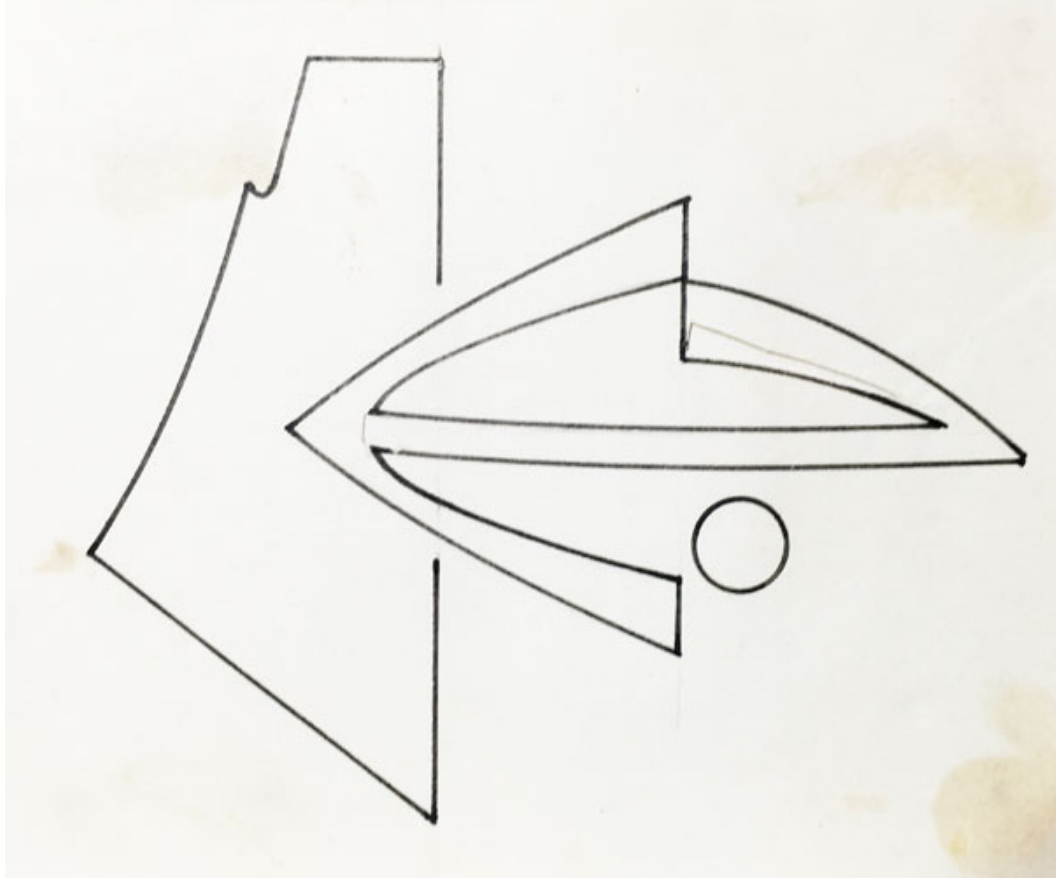
My drawing of the Fa + arrow March 1969



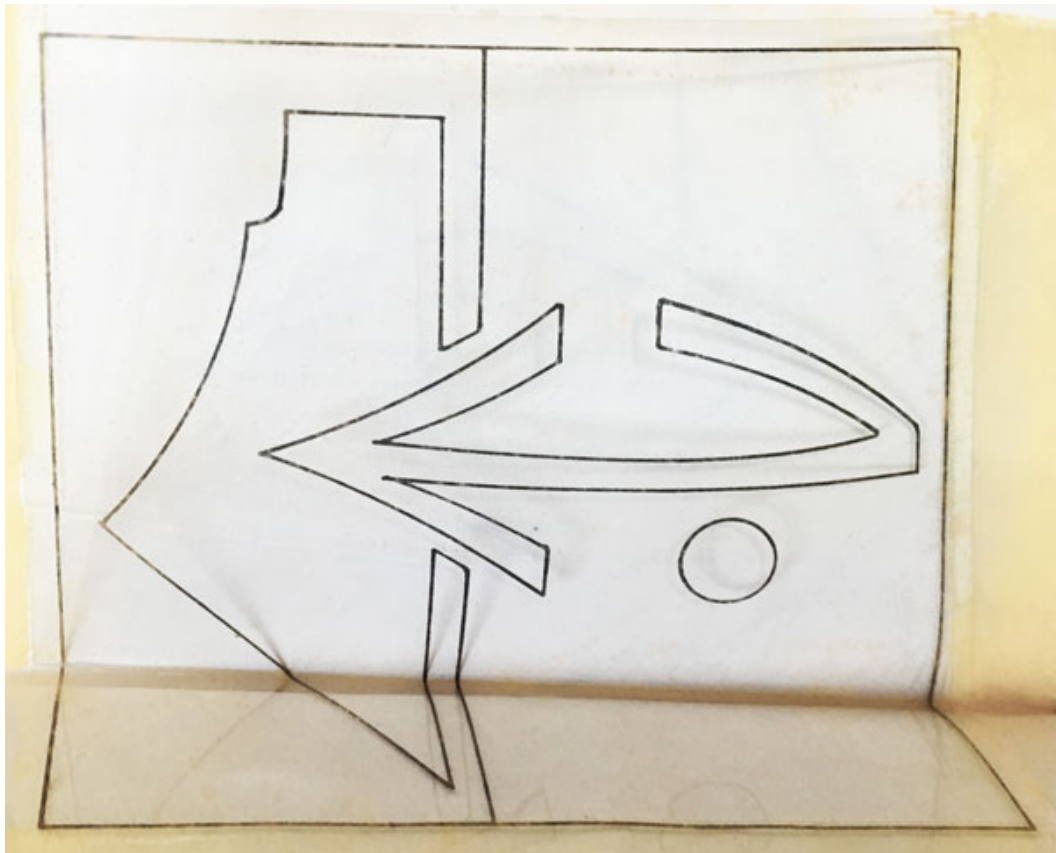
Brainstorming with X - the map is added. February 1969



The Fath logo sketch. April-May 1969

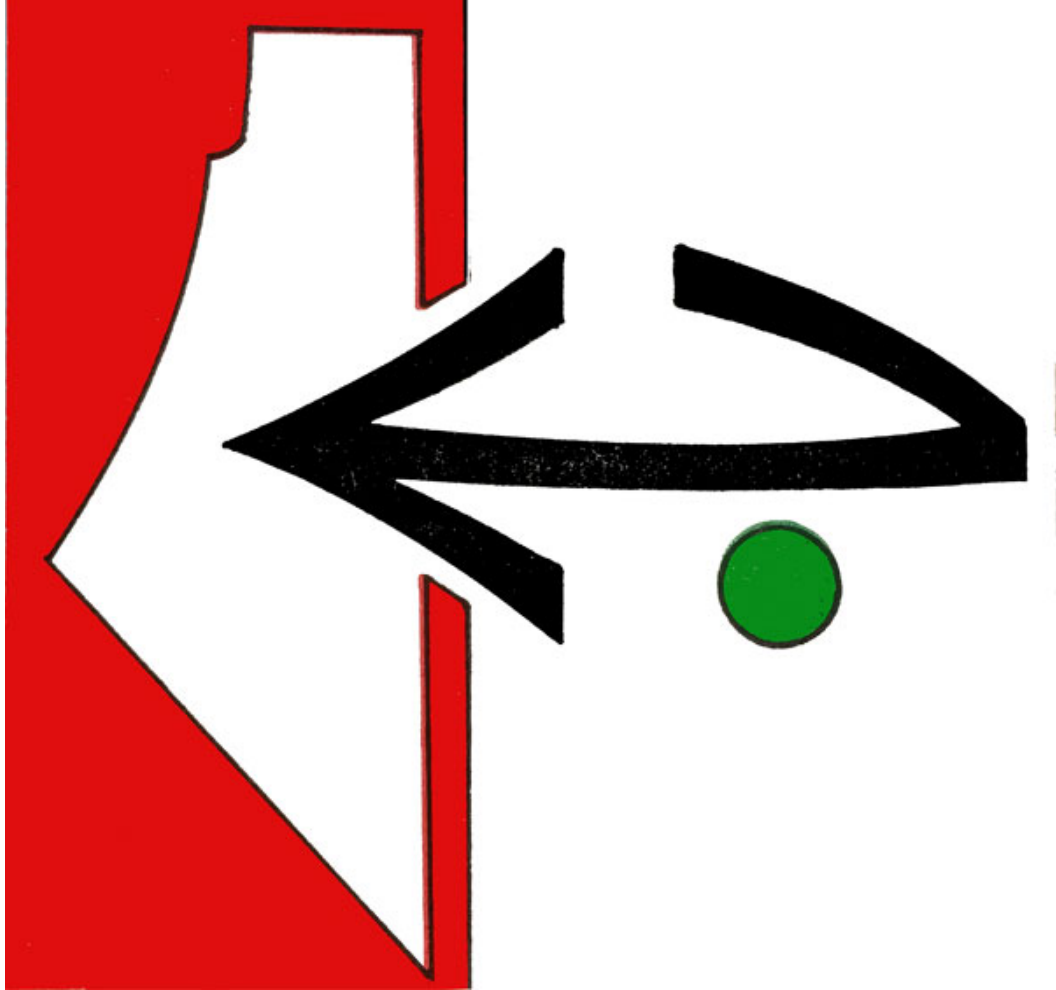


An early sketch of the PFLP symbol. May 1969



The final PFLP logo in outline. May 1969.

HOME
PALESTINE



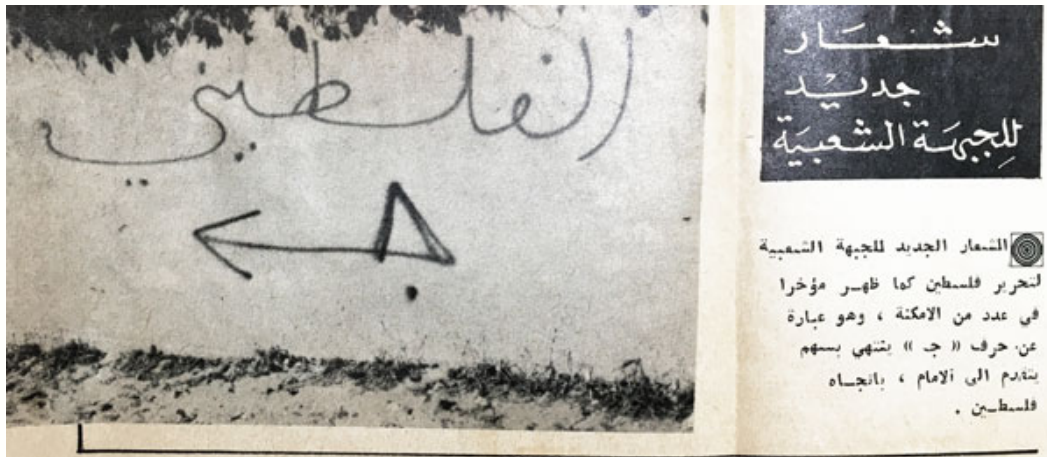
Printer's proof of the logo. Nov. 1969



Ghassan Kanafani, spokesman of the PFLP in his Beirut office around 1970 just as I remembered him. I went there on business related to the Palestinian refugee children's drawings book *In Time of War, Children Testify*. The finalized symbol is pinned on a map of Palestine. To the left is the circular version which became the standard.



In 1970 I was asked to design this medallion or key-holder. 36 mm diameter.



A news item from *AlHadaf* the official PFLP magazine edited by Ghassan Kanafani. November 1969. "A NEW SYMBOL FOR THE POPULAR FRONT. The new symbol for the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine, as it appeared recently in a number of places. It consists of the letter 'J' ending with an arrow thrust forward, towards Palestine."

ABOUT HALF A CENTURY LATER, IN PALESTINE:

Now, 47 years after designing the PFLP symbol, the enthusiasm and wrath of those years is a distant memory. Nevertheless, the symbol itself is still very much in use as I discovered via a simple Internet search. The logo helps keep alive the spirit and hope of liberation, reminding us of the necessity of regaining our own homeland. It is still used at rallies attended by thousands, waved at funerals of those who have given up their lives to the cause - often as a result of mistreatment or hunger strikes in Israeli jails, and scrawled on the Separation Wall eating up our beloved Palestine from the inside.



Palestinian girls attend a Popular Front rally in Gaza in 2015. Note how they added a ^ mark to the symbol, for the letter Sheen in *Shaabiyya*- Popular. Right, the official symbol as it is distributed digitally from the group's website. My original outline of the logo have become slightly distorted, for example the horizontal line lost its subtle curvature.

الجبهة الشعبية لتحرير فلسطين

HOME
PALESTINE

قاوم
فيدياك
الإعصار



A poster announcing the martyrdom of university student Saji Darwish shot by Israeli troops near Ramallah in Palestine in 2014 after a rock-throwing incident.

**HOME
PALESTINE**



Saji's funeral procession.