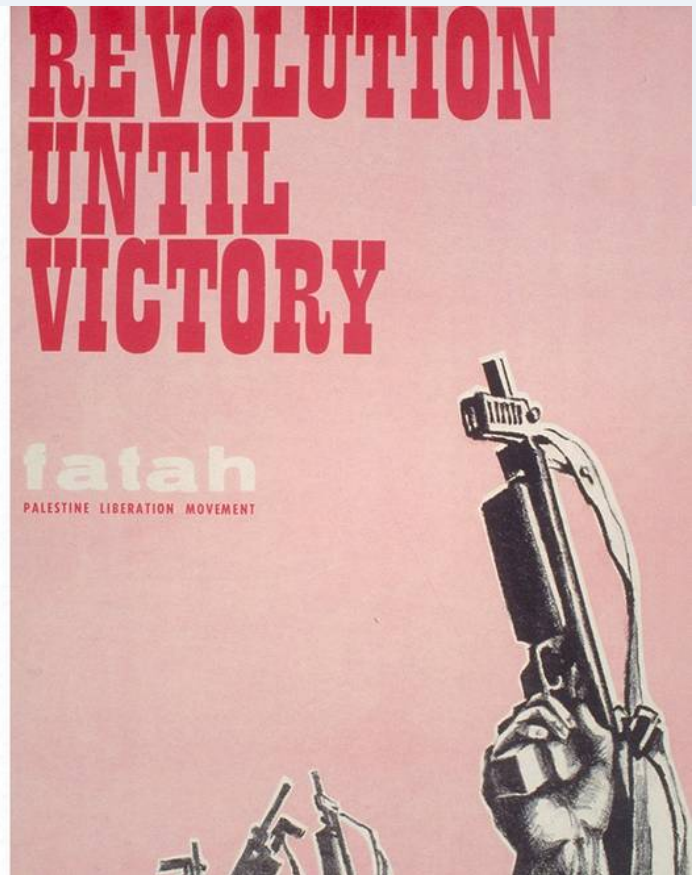


DISCRIMINATION A DAY AGO

Palestine Poster Project: An art form that fact-checks distorted history

For over five decades, a former Peace Corps volunteer has been collecting and preserving posters made during a time when Israel was known as Palestine even among Zionists.

**SAAD HASAN**

TRT WORLD

Palestine Poster Project

Dan Walsh doesn't like talking about himself. He even refuses to waste time on answering questions about his personal information that reporters are trained to ask their interview subjects.

“I'll tell you my age, I'll tell you where I grew up, but that's not of interest to me. That is used by Western media as a way of talking about Palestine. They sort of flavour it as a human interest story: ‘Hey, look, there's this guy, he collects Palestine posters’. Most Western journalists lack the courage to directly talk about the posters and Palestine.”

Walsh runs the Palestine Poster Project [website](#). A curator and a connoisseur of revolutionary art, he has collected more than 17,000 posters related to Palestine dating back to 1897. Any poster that features Palestine in any way is of interest to him — even if it was produced by Zionists.

“I need you to understand this distinction: It's not a Palestinian poster, but a Palestine poster.”



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The posters became a vehicle for artists to express their feelings creatively.

This emphasis on distinguishing between Palestine and Palestinian is particularly important for 73-year-old Walsh because content related to the former serves as “proof” that the land of Palestine had existed long before the state of Israel. And there is a plethora of visual and artistic evidence to back that fact up — especially in the form of posters published by Zionists before the foundation of Israel in 1948.

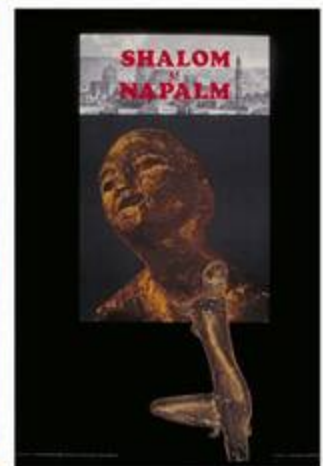
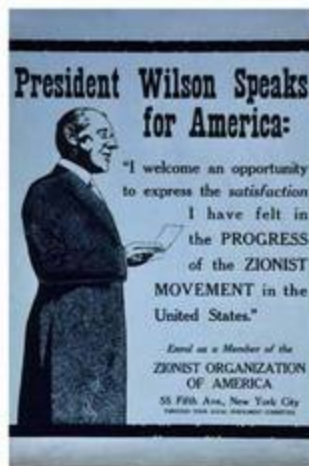
When Walsh gives presentations about his project to students, he displays a variety of posters from a period dating back to 50 years before Israel was even established.

The Zionist movement began to take shape in the late-19th century. It encouraged Jews to move to Palestine and buy real estate. The movement's goal was to establish a Jewish homeland.

There was no TV or radio then, so they used posters — like one of a newly founded wine-producing company in Palestine that was run by some of the first Jewish immigrants. On it, the word ‘Palestine’ appears in several places.

Israelis often send Walsh angry emails, provoked and peeved by the idea that Israeli posters are featured on a website along with artwork related to Palestine. To such emails, Walsh responds with Zionist posters, which refer to the modern-day Israeli state as Palestine — a land Zionists encouraged Jews to migrate to (known as the Aliyah), to develop business in and to settle in.

Walsh has run the Palestine Poster Project since 2003. But he started collecting posters in the 1970s when he worked in Morocco as part of the Peace Corps, a US-led humanitarian programme.



Palestine Poster Project also has hundreds of Zionist posters in its collection that tell the tale of how Palestinian Arabs were displaced from their ancestral homes.

Since October 7 when Israel launched a military campaign and began relentlessly bombing Gaza after an unprecedented Hamas attack, the traffic on his website has surged. Earlier this month, hits were so high that it crashed.

A closer look at Walsh's collection reveals much more than the artistic brilliance that goes into making the posters: It's a testament to how the Palestinian liberation movement is evolving and getting stronger and more globalised by the day.

From China to Brazil - draw Palestine

Palestinians began telling the tale of their struggle through designs, shapes and colours a few years after the Nakba, the Arabic word for “catastrophe,” which refers to the violent expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and villages in 1948 — villages that are now part of Israel. Armed Zionist militias raided dozens of villages, forcing more than 700,000 Palestinians to leave their homes to make way for Jews migrating from Europe and elsewhere.

In Israel and the occupied territories, neither Palestinians nor their allies had a free hand to work on or display poster art. Posters featuring anything related to Palestine that were put up on walls and lampposts were taken down immediately.

Nevertheless, they touched upon a wide range of subjects: the longing for their homes — since bulldozed — and olive groves, women’s participation in the freedom struggle and Palestinian poetry.



OTHERS

Despite Israeli restrictions, Palestinian artists and their allies have continuously published resistance posters.

Constantly hounded by Israeli security, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza came up with a medley of designs to circumvent surveillance and suspicion. The posters they made didn’t always show AK-47 rifles or angry men, but featured subtle symbolism, like a Palestinian flag carved up as a pigeon in flight with a teardrop in its eye.

Palestine posters are unique among all “oppositional poster genres,” including those of revolutionary Cuba, the former

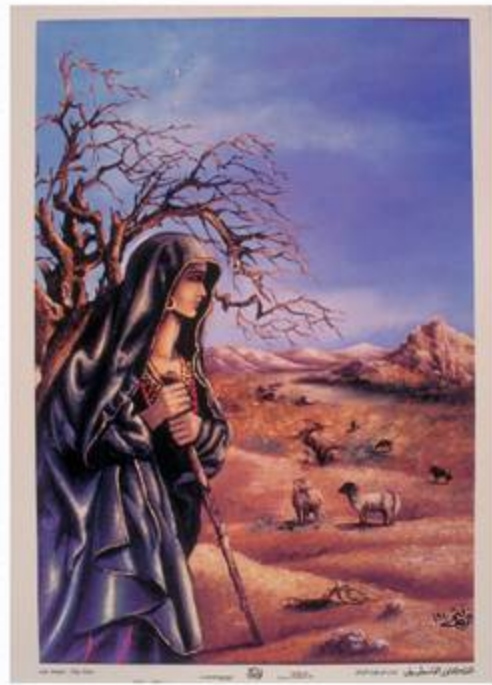
Congress, revolutionary Nicaragua and East Germany, Walsh says.

“Palestine poster [art] is the only 20th century political poster art genre to transition to the 21st century. And it continues to grow exponentially every day.”

Walsh receives email submissions from around the world on a daily basis. Crowd-sourcing plays an important role in how he has built such a large database.

“More Palestine posters are being produced today and originating from more different countries than any political poster genre in history.”

Artists in countries across the world — from Brazil, China, Iraq and Japan, to Iraq, Türkiye and the United States — are producing Palestine posters, whereas most of the artists who produced posters for or about Cuba or the former USSR were Cuban or Soviet. The global participation in the Palestinian struggle may be because Palestine’s story is being expressed by artists who may not necessarily share language or culture, but who believe in a common cause.



OTHERS

Artists from around the world have contributed to Palestine poster art.

Missing history

Walsh might never have put his collection online if it wasn't for the blatant erasure of Palestine's history from American schools and curricula.

Over the years, Walsh was invited to various educational institutions to share the knowledge of foreign culture he had acquired as a former Peace Corps worker.

Soon enough, he realised that the history textbooks in American high schools were missing out on an important part of the story: In all the books he came across, the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict started from 1948 onwards.

Teachers who know about Zionist history are too scared to teach it to their students, fearing a backlash, he says.

“A lot of teachers, academics, researchers and university professors are intimidated by the response of organised Zionism to what they might do in their classrooms.”

The self-censorship of Palestine’s history has become even more pronounced in the past 10 to 15 years, says Walsh, who is a fluent Arabic speaker.

“It’s become more problematic to teach about Palestine in American schools because of the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance).”

Here’s how the [textbooks](#) Walsh reviewed introduced Israel-Palestine history to American students:

“After Britain withdrew from Palestine in 1948, Jews proclaimed the independent state of Israel. Arab states launched the first of several wars against Israel, but were defeated.” - *World History: The Modern Era*

And this:

“In November 1947, the [UN] General Assembly voted in favor of partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jewish community made plans to declare independence while the Palestinians, who felt the proposed

land division was unfair, reacted in horror and took up arms.” - *The Earth and Its People – A Global History*

A little over a decade ago, Walsh, a student at Georgetown University, wrote his masters thesis, in which he argued that a new curriculum should be introduced in American high schools based on poster art chronicling Palestine’s history. He proposed that the course be introduced with the earliest poster in his possession: a poster of Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism.

“American Jews will tell you, ‘Oh, we never heard about Theodor Herzl; we didn’t discuss Zionism in our homes’ or ‘We talked about Zionism, but never heard about Palestine’.”

Like so many others speaking out about the Palestinian struggle, Walsh has faced resistance for highlighting Palestine’s history, which inevitably puts a spotlight on the plight of Palestinians.

On November 15, Walsh and his team will be submitting the Palestine Poster Project to UNESCO’s ‘Memory of the World’ programme, which aims to preserve documentary heritage in and of conflict zones. This is the third time in 10 years that Walsh will try to have the posters recognised by the UN body.

Getting on the Memory of the World’s International Register means the website would be listed alongside the Book of Kells and Anne Frank’s diary.

“In 2014 and 2016, our nomination was approved at every level by subject matter experts and historians. But the then UNESCO head Irina Bokova vetoed it.”

Bokova called the collection "anti-Semitic" — even though many of the posters were designed by Israeli artists. Since then, UNESCO has rewritten the rules, stripping the agency’s head of the power to veto a nomination.

“We will submit the nomination again. Let’s see what happens.”

SOURCE: TRT WORLD



Saad Hasan

Saad Hasan is a staff writer at TRT World.

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