

opinion by limiting Jewish immigration via the 1939 White Paper, McDonald argued that British white papers were “not immutable” (p. 308) and could be changed for the sake of allowing more Jews into Palestine. In an early 1943 article, McDonald in fact wrote that for the bulk of the Jews still trapped in Europe, the only alternative to death was emigration to Palestine. Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann was so enamored of the article that he had it reprinted in the journal *New Palestine* (p. 308).

It is true that the nations of the world by and large failed to open their doors to large numbers of Jewish refugees from Nazism just as, conversely, the Zionist community in Palestine was most anxious to absorb them. Being a man passionately devoted to finding refuge for these unfortunate people, McDonald perhaps can be forgiven for believing that Zionism offered the only solution to their plight. But in sympathizing only with the Zionist perspective on the Palestine conundrum, McDonald and other Westerners dismissed the Palestinians as expendable, people (and not “a people”) who easily could be moved elsewhere in order to settle Jewish immigrants. Other documents in the book reveal this same attitude about the possibility of settling Jews in other colonial regions: the wishes of the inhabitants living there seemingly never mattered. What mattered was the need of the moment. In this lies the tragedy inherent in this book: we find tremendous effort and sympathy toward certain refugees, and seeming disregard for other people who later would become refugees themselves.

## GRAFFITI SOCIETY

**Gaza Graffiti: Messages of Love and Politics**, by Mia Gröndahl. Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2009. 156 pages. \$29.95 paper.

### *Reviewed by Toufic Haddad*

Swedish photojournalist Mia Gröndahl complements her thirty-year history of documenting the Palestinian experience

in this beautiful, illustrated book exploring the rich and colorful world of Gaza's graffiti. But this work is more than just a collection of images suitable as a gift for urban art aficionados. It equally provides insightful commentary on Gaza's graffiti culture and the society that produced it, demonstrating the acumen of a veteran investigative journalist. Images and commentary combine to guide readers into a world they would otherwise have little exposure to, allowing them to assess Gaza's graffiti both as free-standing works of art and as objects of propaganda.

Gröndahl's photographic eye is empathetic to her subject, invariably preferring to photograph graffiti as part of a social context and not merely as paint on walls. The effect captures Gaza's grittiness and vivacity while providing a human face to the too-often dehumanized people of Gaza.

The book is structured around basic genres (calligraphy, politics, portraits, congratulations, murals), each explored in an investigative essay based on field interviews and a broader understanding of Gaza's history, society, and political life. The actual graffiti featured is only a fraction of what Gaza has up on its walls on any given day and spans only the period of the second intifada. It nonetheless captures some fine works of art, imparting the impression that graffiti in Gaza is both technically sophisticated and politically important.

Gröndahl's main contention is that graffiti is a product of the unique political and social context of the Gaza Strip. It was born out of an initial need to create a communication medium between the underground resistance factions during the first intifada and the people the factions were addressing. Over time, Gaza's graffiti was able to qualitatively advance thanks to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from most urban centers in the occupied Palestinian territory in the wake of the Oslo agreements. This provided graffiti artists the space to better plan and deliver their works. With the eruption of the second intifada in late 2000, Gaza's graffiti catapulted to a whole new level, as the explosive political context provided artists with ample subject matter to graphically portray on Gaza's walls. Graffiti became a visual tool to reinforce a subjectivity of resistance that Palestinian political factions were keen on nurturing. Graffiti was taken so seriously in Gaza that the fierce political competition

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between factions was equally reflected in a competition between artists over the quality of their graffiti, the caustic nature of their messaging, and the actual size and placement of their works.

Gröndahl wisely avoids judging the political messaging of the graffiti, which would have forced her onto the complex historical and political terrain of having to explain things such as Palestinian factional adherence to armed struggle or Palestinian veneration of martyrdom. Instead she takes an approach that accepts the graffiti as is, using it to explore intra-Palestinian dynamics. Through this she is able to shed light on the social and cultural sphere within which the graffiti is produced, which also includes nonpolitical graffiti such as celebratory wedding or Hajj pilgrimage art. Gaza's graffiti hence becomes a means for Gröndahl to show a range of human emotions and dynamics, thereby avoiding singular portrayals of Gaza as strictly political and resistance oriented. When she is critical, it is reserved for the political culture that arose in Gaza after mid-2007, when Hamas militarily dislodged Fatah from power and consolidated its own rule throughout the Strip. The effect in her view was to destroy the political pluralism of Gaza, leaving little space for opinions other than Hamas's and, concurrently, Hamas-affiliated graffiti artists. Her critique of Hamas governance in this respect is justified; however, one wonders whether she could have been more critical in her portrayal of graffiti during the years when Fatah led the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. Though relations between factions and graffiti artists were indeed more comradely in those years, the walls of Gaza were still subversive spaces where Fatah did its fair share of censoring Hamas-affiliated graffiti and graffiti artists.

Overall, *Gaza Graffiti: Messages of Love and Politics* is a valuable and unique document that convincingly provides a bottom-up perspective on life and politics in Gaza. The subject could have been exhausted further, with the level of its discourse clearly aimed at winning a new layer of readers less familiar with its subject. Here and there are also mistakes in captions, which misidentify or mistranslate factional names, symbols, or messaging. For example, a translation of "Popular Resistance Committees" (the group's own official English translation) is captioned

"People's Resistance Committees" (pp. 48–49), and a Hamas logo is incorrectly identified as an al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades logo (pp. 60–61). These errors expose Gröndahl as working through translators and fixers, where communication must have broken down at one point. Nonetheless, these flaws are minor and should not detract readers from the overall power and quality of this work, which is not only important but also groundbreaking.

## CULTURAL PRODUCTION

**The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan**, by Steven Salaita. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006. ix + 182 pages. Notes to p. 208. Bibliography to p. 220. Index to p. 234. \$34.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

### *Reviewed by Sinan Antoon*

Settler-colonial cultures and states draw from the same discursive well, and the commonalities in their national myths and practices are quite obvious. *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan*, based on Steven Salaita's doctoral dissertation, revisits the settler-colonial paradigm but shifts the perspective to the cultural production of the *victims* of settler-colonialism rather than the colonizers. It juxtaposes Palestinian and Native American writers and attempts a "comparative analysis . . . with attention to how politics influence literary production" (p. 1). Salaita acknowledges the challenges of choosing primary sources for such an ambitious project and decides not to consider poetry for "pragmatic and philosophical reasons . . . since the available fiction better informs the historical and political claims that follow" (p. 9). This is an unfortunate decision, because Mahmoud Darwish's famous poem about the Native Americans, "The Penultimate Speech of the Red Indian," which the author rightly cites as an "epic" poem, merits more than the page and a half it was given and should have been the subject of a separate chapter.

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Graffiti's renegade aesthetic separates writers from the dominant society and assures possession of something that others cannot control. "I don't want nobody in no three piece suit to like my stuff," proclaims Sae 6. "You see, I'm an underground person. . . we don't cater for these people, you see I just don't give a fuck." producing graffiti art with a crew builds team work in that the crew works together for the accomplishment of a common goal. The feeling of this achievement in league with others is of value to the artist. Street art beautifies the community by appearing on areas that normally would be eyesores. Graffiti are made illegal, as in homes or shops where people do not want them done. A lot of signs have been tagged over by some graffiti and it could cause road accidents as a result of driver's confusion. Not All Graffiti is Vandalism. The graffiti art culture is increasingly being accepted in many cities around the world. However, some society players still can't answer the question, is graffiti art or vandalism? In many cases, graffiti could be vulgar, crude and can be considered nothing but pure vandalism. The aspect of graffiti as an underground art culture, that is intended to