**The Palestinian struggle**

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Saturday, Jul 02, 2022

Years before the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, US media introduced many new characters, promoting them as ‘experts’ who helped ratchet up US propaganda, ultimately allowing the US government to secure enough popular support for the war.

Though enthusiasm for war began dwindling in later years, the invasion of Iraq had begun with a relatively strong popular mandate that allowed US President George W Bush to claim the role of liberator of Iraq, the fighter of ‘terrorism’ and the champion of US global interests. According to a CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll conducted on March 24, 2003 – a few days after the invasion – seventy-two percent of Americans were in favor of the war.

Only now are we beginning to fully appreciate the massive edifice of lies, deceit and forgery involved in shaping the war narrative, and the sinister role played by mainstream media in demonizing Iraq and dehumanizing its people. Future historians will continue with the task of unpacking the war conspiracy for years to come.

Consequently, it is also important to acknowledge the role played by Iraq’s own ‘native informants’, as late professor Edward Said would describe them. The “native informant (is a) willing servant of imperialism”, according to the influential Palestinian intellectual.

Thanks to the various American invasions and military interventions, these ‘informants’ have grown in number and usefullness to the extent that, in various western intellectual and media circles, they define what is erroneously viewed as ‘facts’ concerning most Arab and Muslim countries. From Afghanistan, to Iran, to Syria, Palestine, Libya and, of course Iraq, among others, these ‘experts’ are constantly parroting messages that are tailored to fit US-western agendas.

These ‘experts’ are often depicted as political dissidents. They are recruited – whether officially via government-funded think tanks or otherwise – by western governments to provide a convenient depiction of the ‘realities’ in the Middle East – and elsewhere – as a rational, political or moral justification for war and various other forms of intervention.

Though this phenomenon is being widely understood – especially as its dangerous consequences became too apparent in the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan – another phenomenon rarely receives the necessary attention. In the second scenario, the ‘intellectual’ is not necessarily an ‘informant’, but a victim, whose message is entirely shaped by his sense of self-pity and victimhood. In the process of communicating that collective victimhood, this intellectual does his people a disfavor by presenting them as hapless and having no human agency whatsoever.

Palestine is a case in point.

The Palestine ‘victim intellectual’ is not an intellectual in any classic definition. Said refers to the intellectual as “an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion”. Gramsci argued that intellectuals are “(those) who sustain, modify and alter modes of thinking and behavior of the masses”. He referred to them as “purveyors of consciousness”. The ‘victim intellectual’ is none of these.

In the case of Palestine, this phenomenon was not accidental. Due to the limited spaces available to Palestinian thinkers to speak openly and truly about Israeli crimes and about Palestinian resistance to military occupation and apartheid, some have strategically chosen to use whatever available margins to communicate any kind of messaging that could be nominally accepted by western media and audiences.

In other words, in order for Palestinian intellectuals to be able to operate within the margins of mainstream western society, or even within the space allocated by certain pro-Palestinian groups, they can only be ‘allowed to narrate’ as ‘purveyors’ of victimhood. Nothing more.

Those familiar with the Palestinian intellectual discourse, in general, especially following the first major Israeli war on Gaza in 2008-9, must have noticed how accepted Palestinian narratives regarding the war rarely deviate from the decontextualized and depoliticized Palestinian victim discourse. While understanding the depravity of Israel and the horrondousness of its war crimes is critical, Palestinian voices that are given a stage to address these crimes are frequently denied the chance to present their narratives in the form of strong political or geopolitical analyses, let alone denounce Israel’s Zionist ideology or proudly defend Palestinian resistance.

Much has been written about the hypocrisy of the West in handling the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine war, especially when compared to the decades-long Israeli occupation of Palestine or the genocidal Israeli wars in Gaza. But little has been said about the nature of the Ukrainian messaging if compared to those of Palestinians: the former demanding and entitled, while the latter mostly passive and bashful.

While top Ukrainian officials often tweet such statements that western officials can “go f\*\*k yourselves”, Palestinian officials are constantly begging and pleading. The irony is that Ukrainian officials are attacking the very nations that have supplied them with billions of dollars of ‘lethal weapons’, while Palestinian officials are careful not to offend the same nations that support Israel with the very weapons used to kill Palestinian civilians.

One may argue that Palestinians are tailoring their language to accommodate whichever political and media spaces that are available to them. This, however, hardly explains why many Palestinians, even within ‘friendly’ political and academic environments, can only see their people as victims and nothing else.

This is hardly a new phenomenon. It goes back to the early years of the Israeli war on the Palestinian people. Palestinian leftist intellectual Ghassan Kanafani, like others, was aware of this dichotomy.

Kanafani contributed to the intellectual awareness among various revolutionary societies in the Global South during a critical era for national liberation struggles everywhere. He was the posthumous recipient of the Afro-Asia Writers’ Conference’s Lotus Prize for Literature in 1975, three years after he was assassinated by Israel in Beirut, in July 1972.

Like others in his generation, Kanafani was adamant in presenting Palestinian victimization as part and parcel of a complex political reality of Israeli military occupation, western colonialism and US-led imperialism. A famous story is often told about how he met his wife, Anni, in South Lebanon. When Anni, a Danish journalist, arrived in Lebanon in 1961, she asked Kanafani if she could visit the Palestinian refugee camps. “My people are not animals in a zoo,” Kanafani replied.

Excerpted: ‘Palestinians ‘Are Not

Animals in a Zoo’’. Courtesy: Counterpunch.org