The Palestinian National Personality and the Nakba

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of the Nakba on the Palestinian Personality. The study approached the literature as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, addressing both theoretical and applied research. The findings revealed that the physical and spiritual sacrifices of the Palestinian people made to preserve their national personality indicate the strong connection between their national personality and the disputed land between the Palestinians and their Israeli occupiers. Based on the traumatic experiences of the Nakba, Palestinians had adopted new types of socialization—all of which aimed at preserving the Palestinian political, social, and cultural identities. These efforts aimed at inculcating revolutionary values and sentiments, which would help preserve their national identity and liberate Palestine in the future generations.

Keywords: Palestinian National Personality, refugees, diaspora, Nakba.

1. Introduction

In the human history, few crimes have been as brutal and perpetrated at the scale as that of the Zionists driving Palestinians out of their land in 1948 – a population-wide crime that would later become known as the Palestinian Nakba (Jibara, 1998; Allan, 2007; Banat et al., 2018; Dayyeh et al., 2019).

According to Sanbar (2001), the contemporary history of the Palestinian people turns to a key date: 1948. That year, a country and its people disappeared from the map of the world. In 1948, the Palestinian people suffered from a traumatic experience that cannot be erased from their collective memory (Abu Sitta, 1997, 2001; Banat et al., 2018).

The disaster of the Nakba, this cataclysmic event, has imprinted itself as the main issue affecting the Palestinian personality and collective memory. It is the starting point for many experiences that can be grouped under the title of "the consequences of the Nakba". In addition to the destruction of an entire society, the Nakba represents an unbridgeable gap in the place, time, consciousness and personality of the Palestinians (Banat, 2010; Dayyeh et al., 2018, 2019).

2. Background

The fact that the Palestinian society is an integral part of the Muslim Arab world is essential to understand while studying the Palestinian personality (Banat, 2010). Its personality is similar to the Arab communities; the essential characteristics shared by these two societies are derived fundamentally from the same Islamic Arab cultural system, and their related implications are as follows:

1. The Islamic religious value system and the spiritual and social mediums that determine the scales of truth are derived from this culture, the philosophy of life and many others are the outcome of their general cultural similarities.

2. The Palestinian social system is important to the larger Arab social system in terms of its role, position, the sub-concentration of its cities, countryside, and nomad clusters which share similar characteristics.

3. Time and place have influenced the national personality, general culture, and subcultures. These factors categorized the Palestinian and Arab societies together based on historical, economic, cultural, and military experiences (Banat, 2010).

Following the Nakba in 1948, the Palestinian society politically, economically, and socially isolated itself from the Arab social networks. Furthermore, it was placed in a special state wherein it developed differently and overwhelmingly. This enforced distance between the Palestinian society, and the larger Arab area widened because of the external colonizers. In fact, new and different elements and approaches developed in a limited political and national agenda as the Palestinians suffered from the threat of destruction, premeditated annihilation, and abrogation of their national identity and its social and cultural structure. Additionally, this caused the social and cultural fissures within the Palestinian society to expand, causing the Palestinian personality to develop through its own particular experiences (Abu Injela, 1996; Allan, 2007).

3. The Palestinian Personality

In the structure of the Palestinian personality, there are differences among the personalities of the constituent parts among the Palestinian people. Although individual personalities cannot be

objectively discussed, similarity can be found in the shared experiences of the Palestinian people in the past and the present. Moreover, there is a striking similarity in the essence and core of the sub-personalities of the Palestinian villages, Bedouins and cities. The slight difference in personality that might exist at the individual level and at a small-group level is in degree and not nature.

To determine the national dimensions of the Palestinian personality or the national self, Sayegh (1983) interviewed the camp residents about their reasons for absconding from their villages and cities in 1948 and 1967. Despite the superficial differences in their presentation, the crux of their answers was as follows, "We are Palestinians, we were Palestinians, we are still Palestinians, we will stay like this for ever, we will return to Palestine sooner or later". This determination indicates that whether as individuals or as a society, Palestinians consider their existence to be futile unless it is linked to their national identity.

Palestinians reflect on some general traits that influence their behavior and actions. They reveal intense steadfastness and stability, being repeated often and in different situations. Moreover, they define the Palestinian personality (Wasfi, 1981; Abu Injela, 1996; Muhawi & Kana'na, 2001; Banat, 2010). These traits are as follows:

1. Religious features: Palestinians are religious; their religious passion is too intense which is expressed through their official and popular legacy—by worshipping, feasting, and engaging in political activities. Historically, Palestine has been regarded as the cradle of the three major monotheistic religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) of the world. In fact, it hosts several holy places such as Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Nativity, and other cultural and religious landmarks, which affirm the religious practices that influence the Palestinian behavior and actions.

2. Sustainable survival, along with the gradual changes, occurring in Palestine over time: Despite the wars and campaigns that it has frequently witnessed for centuries, the Palestinian society continues to exist and its inhabitants thrive.

3. The love of the land and the Palestinian association with it: Palestinian peasants love and cherish their land for their lives and identities. When the land was threatened, Palestinians were livid and their lives became a series of rebellions.

4. Offering, giving, redemption, sacrifice, and martyrdom: Palestinian individuals have learnt to safeguard and redeem their home and land by sacrificing their lives for the sake of their country and land. These sacrifices of the young Palestinians were influenced by several characteristics such as rebellion, the fight for freedom, suicide martyrdom (Istishhady). These characteristics are internationally known and recognized by both allies and foes (Banat, 2010).

5. Innovation by adapting to new emergent situations: Palestinians have learnt to adapt to trying situations. They master managing new responsibilities and adjust efficiently with their surroundings using the secrets that they have learnt over the years.

6. Dignity, chastity, and preservation of honor: Palestinians have learnt how to respect the others' sentiments and ensure displaying behavior that conforms to certain standards and values to be respected and admired by others. As a result of their diaspora and deprived experiences, Palestinians have become very sensitive; they often claim that their dignity is their only remaining asset.

7. Belonging to a family and a clan: The reverence of the old creates a sentiment of moral belonging and oriental commitment towards one's family; this involves helping them physically and morally because according to the Palestinians, family is home; and home, land, and village form their psychological life, social framework, and conscience.

8. Seriousness, grief, and enthusiasm: Palestinians feel such overwhelming emotions that lead to impulsiveness and sacrifice—for their homeland or helping a neighbor or a friend.

9. Contradiction: This is reflected in how the Palestinians deal with different situations such as facing an occupying authority instead of a national one. Often, they make compromises to get rid of their various daily crises. In fact, Israeli and western researchers have associated a number of negative characteristics with the Palestinian personality, which are scientifically or rationally unsound.

4. The Interaction Process in the Palestinian Society

The internal contact in the Palestinian society has developed from face-to-face interactions, which are defined by the relationships in groups and the time and place of the interaction among the Palestinian sub-clusters in the cities, villages, or Bedouins. Fundamental social relationships

governed them before 1948 based on the prevailing cultural system then. Due to the British Mandate and the invasion of the Jewish settlers into Palestine, this pattern modified into an indirect one, based on the medium through which the message travels. This laid the foundation for developing advanced means of communication. However, the British Mandate and its suppressive policy coerced its own objectives, significance, and purposes on the communication processes of the members of the Palestinian society until the Nakba in 1948. This influenced the cultural and social communication significantly (Budairi et al., 1990; Muhawi & Kana'na, 2001; Banat, 2010).

The rise of the Jewish settlers' society complicated the communication process between the Palestinian concentrations and clusters, and disintegrated its elements through unwarranted interference, as a result of the objectives of the British Mandate that were a disturbing element in the communication process. This interrupted their communication process, thus consciously distancing places and disrupting the continuity of time. As a result, direct communication was threatened and eventually paralyzed, especially as the communication process was exposed to aggressive external control. This led to the emergence of other indirect means of communication such as Arab broadcasting stations, the telephone, the post and the telegraph (Allan, 2007; Banat, 2010).

The communication process between Palestine and the other societies was also subject to external control by the authorities of the British Mandate. This communication used to traverse the Jewish settlements, and thus was controlled by the Israeli authorities, which led to further suppression of the Palestinian people. Consequently, the Palestinian society was deprived of its means of internal communication due to the suppression of the occupation. Therefore, it aimed at returning the Palestinian national identity to the Palestinian time and place (Budairi et al., 1990; Jibara, 1998; Banat, 2010).

5. The Social Control in the Palestinian Society

Social control includes the different processes that shape the behavior of the individuals to be in harmony with the culture of a society. Moreover, the social organization is the primary objective of social control. Individual and collective objectives are achieved through this control, which prevents the deviation from the group. Both (social organization and social control) organize the relationship between the individual and the group, help prevent conflict, facilitate balance in the society, and protect the social structure from deteriorating and disintegrating (Banat, 2010; 2018).

The Ottoman authority in 1917, the authority of the British Mandate in1948, and the Zionist movement in 1948, as well as Arab regimes, implemented external social control on the Palestinian society in order to build the appropriate social organizations according to their purposes. These efforts resulted in the ongoing Palestinian resistance against the external control processes of the Mandate and continued against the Israeli domination. The organization of the Palestinian society was developed to refute the internal social control requirements, leading to the emergence of a social organization in the Palestinian society despite the absence of any national authority implementing internal social control. This unique feature has been derived from the social structure of the Palestinian communities, based on its values, standards, and cultural and social systems as represented in their school, family, clan, village, rebellion, nationalism, and encountering threats, which leads to the production of:

1. The preservation of the family and familial relationships as a social organization and social control body.

2. The preservation of the image of the social structure in spite of the displacement, evacuation, and belonging to the land in order to preserve cultural systems and systems of values, standards, religion and homeland.

3. The development of positive adaptation approaches with the scientific developments, new roles and benefit from the experiences of other societies.

4. The development of the resistance movement of Palestine both inside and abroad to preserve national gains, the regain of the homeland, and the entire systems of the society.

5. The benefit from the resistance of the external aggression to organize and control the society from the inside (Budairi et al., 1990; Banat, 2010; Dayyeh et al., 2018, 2019).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the traumatic experiences of the Nakba, the Palestinians adopted new types of socialization—all of which aimed at preserving the Palestinian political, social, and cultural identities. These efforts aimed at inculcating revolutionary values and sentiments, which would help preserve their national identity and liberate Palestine in the future generations.

The physical and spiritual sacrifices of the Palestinian people made to preserve their national personality indicate the strong connection between their national personality and the disputed land

between the Palestinians and their Israeli occupiers. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Giving the concept of the Palestinian national personality the utmost importance for the curriculum and different media outlets.
2. Empirical research is essential to expand the characteristics of the Palestinian national personality after 71 years of the Nakba.
3. A comparative study of the national personality among Palestinian youth in the Diaspora is recommended.

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