

The Dehumanization of the “Arab”: The Media Repeats Small Lies to Make “One Big Lie”

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Author’s Note

Intro, 26 September 2015: I wrote this thirteen years ago and on rereading it now I think it deserves a fresh airing given as how things have just gone downhill since then with the total demonisation of the Muslim/Arab in the so-called civilised world.

And, it must be me that’s changed because I’m even more appalled today by the repellent racism of Kevin Toolis’s muck in the Independent than when I first read it all those years ago.

This is a kind of followup to the piece entitled “[Let the reader be aware](#)” about the way

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The media repeats lots of small lies to make one Big Lie, predicated on the approach that swallowing a lot of small lies is a lot easier to do than swallowing one Big One.

But there is one Big Lie that has to be addressed and that’s the racist and sexist dehumanisation of the ‘Arab’, in particular, the desperate young women, who lacking F-16s, tanks and helicopter gunships that deal death from a distance and in total impunity, feel it necessary to sacrifice themselves, only we find that they have been transformed into inhuman caricatures, devoid of any self-conscious action or control over their own lives. They are transformed into ‘victims’ of ‘honour codes’ and other ‘alien’ practices, that set them apart from humanity in a disgusting parody of the Western anthropological ‘method’.

I came across an article in the *Observer* (12/10/03) called “The revenger’s tragedy: why women turn to suicide bombing” about the young woman, Hanadi Darajat who blew up a restaurant, killing 19 people and herself and which exemplifies the problem of dealing with an event and how the Big Lie is woven into the truth of an event by stereotyping a people and culture to conform to all the small lies we’ve been fed by our racist and sexist media. Attitudes that reinforces the separation of ‘us’ from ‘them’, out there, in the jungle.

The introduction sets the scene,

“As the honour codes that bound Palestinian families unravel, Islamic Jihad has stepped up its recruitment of women. Kevin Toolis reports from the West Bank on the cycle of slaughter that drove an ambitious female lawyer to become a human bomb”

But before launching into his 'explanation' of what makes a young woman sacrifice herself, the writer sets the scene so to speak with the following melodramatic intro worthy of a Gothic novel,

"The blood red fruit was just beginning to ripen on the pomegranate tree when Israeli undercover soldiers came for Fardi and Salah Darajat in Jenin, the besieged 'city of martyrs', in the occupied West Bank. After a burst of gunfire the cousins lay dying on the dusty track outside the family home. Their bodies were bundled into a Jeep and driven off. For Israeli special forces it was another successful hit against militants from Islamic Jihad. Another notch in the war against terror."

Purporting to be an explanation of why a young Palestinian woman (sister to the two young men murdered by the Israelis) should become a 'martyr' – itself a word loaded with significance for the Western ear, as opposed even to your common or garden 'terrorist', or God forbid, soldier or guerrilla – the piece presents a series of 'explanations' that revolve around a number of key words designed exclusively for Western consumption.

Revenge, martyrdom (now with the sub-text of being a "bride of the Haifa martyrdom operation"), suicide bomber – but now it's a "descent into a suicide bomber war" with all that that implies, and the changing 'role' of women in 'traditional' Muslim society or "honour codes". This is how the writer describes it,

Two years ago Hanadi's 'martyrdom' operation would have been unthinkable. In traditional Palestinian society a woman is the responsibility of her male relatives. Terror organisations could not recruit women as would-be suicide bombers without transgressing the honour codes that require women to seek permission for every action they take outside the family home. To secretly recruit a woman would be seen as an insult to the family's male honour.

Previous female suicide bombings were carried out by Fatah, the secular movement loyal to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. But the women were either divorced or rejected by their immediate family group.

This is a particularly insidious piece of racist propaganda. Note the separation between 'traditional' 'honour codes' and the 'secular' Al Fatah movement, but even here, the women recruited we are told, "were either divorced or rejected by their immediate family group".

The writer could have been describing the social interactions of a tribe of baboons instead of human beings, as implicit in the description is the notion of a fixed hierarchy of behaviour, that for anyone to step outside of, implies a kind of sociopathology, where only the "rejected" are considered suitable candidates for "martyrdom".

And contradicting his previous assertions on the 'traditional role of women', the writer goes on to tell us that,

Hanadi was unusually independent. She was the oldest girl in a family of five girls and two boys, and had studied for a law degree in Jareesh University in Jordan.

Note too, that the writer only calls her by her first name, another signifier that diminishes her. Would he say Tony, when referring to Blair I wonder? And

quoting Ms Darajat's brother, we learn that,

"She was always ambitious even as a child. She said she wanted to be a lawyer even then. And she refused to get married because she wanted to continue her studies. She turned down a few suitors,' says Rahmeh.'

So it appears that Ms Darajat was very much a modern woman, independent and ambitious but living in a society not unlike our own, as the following example illustrates. A woman seeking to be nominated as a candidate for political office as an MP was subjected to the following by a (male) member of the selection committee, who asked her, "What would her husband do for sex when she was away during the week at Westminster?" Ah, the 'honour code' of the white, western male, that is so difficult to do away with.

"Bride of death?"

The most outrageous assertion is when the writer manages to introduce the sexuality of Palestinian women into the equation when he quotes from the video Ms Dajarat made prior to her mission,

'By the will of God I decided to be the sixth martyr who makes her body full with splinters in order to enter every Zionist heart who occupied our country. We are not the only ones who will taste death from their occupation. As they sow so will they reap.'

This bride of death's language is suffused with sexuality but the real woman in the video timidly puts her face in her hands out of embarrassment and blushes as her set piece ends. The camera pulls back to show she is standing under her brother's martyrdom poster. And thus is the blood red fruit of martyrdom complete.

Perhaps she was embarrassed at making a video, as anyone unused to such a process would be, especially knowing she was shortly going to die. How he makes a connection between her statement and her sexuality, is beyond me, especially as firstly, in being translated from the Arabic, much of the sense of what it means to an Arabic speaker is lost and secondly, it conforms to all the prepared statements I've read before. This is cheap and tawdry journalism at its worst with its corny references to "the blood red fruit of martyrdom" echoing his opening remarks. "[B]ride of death," Mr Toolis? Come off it!

The final paragraph pretty well sums up Mr Toolis's racist attitudes when he tells us,

But no wall or checkpoint search will ever be able entirely to stop a wounded creature like Hanadi Darajat, with revenge in her heart, from killing herself and as many Israelis as she can. In the Middle East another terrible harvest of martyrdom and death is just beginning.

No longer a woman or even a human being, Ms Darajat is now a "wounded creature", perhaps a baboon, now reduced to animal actions by Mr Toolis? Shame on you Mr Toolis. I despair, I really do.

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