

The US Palestine-Israel Fairytale

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A memorable quote in Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894) still carries a wealth of relevance. He writes, "They own the [holy] land, just the mere land, and that's all they do own; but it was our folks, our Jews and Christians, that made it holy, and so they haven't any business to be there defiling it. It's a shame and we ought not to stand it a minute. We ought to march against them and take it away from them."

Recently an influential pastor, John Hagee of the Dallas's Cornerstone mega-church, followed his endorsement of Republican presidential candidate John McCain with some telling remarks. "What Senator McCain, I feel, needs to do to bring evangelicals into his camp is to make it very clear that he is a strong defender of Israel and that he has a strong 24 years of being pro-life. And I think on those two issues they will get on common ground and have a common understanding."

Such are the views of a man who has ever-growing influence among an ever-swelling culture in the US — the evangelical Christian bloc. No mention was made of the well being of Palestinians, even Christian Palestinians, many of who are descendants of the early church.

To be sure, the human rights and needs of Palestinians are rarely addressed by American officials. On the rare occasion that they are, any expression of support must be closely followed by a strong condemnation of "Palestinian terrorism".

Welcome to America's parallel reality on Israel and Palestine, bare-faced in its defying the notions of common sense, equality and justice, ever-insistent on peeking at the Arab- Israeli conflict through a looking glass manufactured jointly in the church, in Congress and in the newsroom, where the world is reduced to characters interacting in a Hollywood-like movie set: good guys, well groomed and often white-skinned versus bad guys bearing opposite qualities.

One may become accustomed to watching, reading and listening to the chorus of support that America — its politicians, most of its mainstream media and a large conglomerate of its churches and clergies — tirelessly offers Israel. While the advocacy for Israel by various evangelical churches is both bizarre — since the ultimate objective of this crowd is the annihilation of most Jews and the conversion of some as prerequisites for "the Rapture" — and widely acknowledged, their influence on the political culture of America is not equally recognised. For example, Pastor Hagee, a televangelist to 99 million viewers, established Christians United for Israel (CUFI) in 2005 following the publication of his book, *The Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World*.

US writer Robert Weitzel explains, "Hagee envisions CUFI as the Christian version of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the powerful pro-Israel lobby whose political clout

has significant influence on US foreign policy in the Middle East.”

Journalist Max Blumenthal took his cameras to the CUFI’s Washington-Israel summit held July 2007, in Washington DC. The result was a documentary entitled, Rapture Ready: The Unauthorised Christians United for Israel Tour. It opens with former Republican House Majority Leader Tom Delay, who is asked how important the Second Coming is as a factor in his support for Israel. “Obviously, it is what I live for. Really, I hope it comes tomorrow. Obviously, we need to be connected to Israel to enjoy the Second Coming of Christ.”

Weitzel reports, “John Hagee is not without fawning friends in Washington. Presidential hopeful John McCain made a campaign stop at the summit and admitted to the audience that, ‘it’s very hard trying to do the Lord’s work in the city of Satan ... ‘ House Minority Leader Whip Roy Blunt followed McCain to the podium and assured the faithful that ‘This is a mission, this is a vision that I believe is a vision for God’s time.’ Senator Joe Lieberman was there and described Pastor Hagee as an ‘Ish Elokim,’ a man of God.” Even President Bush sent his best wishes, “I appreciate CUFI members... for your passion and dedication to enhancing the relationship between the United States and Israel. Your efforts set a shining example for others ...”

While most US politicians are self-seeking, power-hungry and would do whatever it takes to be elected, the average American, though it may seem otherwise, is not born “pro-Israel” and “anti-Palestinian”. Most Americans are pro the manufactured yet misleading images of Israel that reach their homes through television, wait at their doorsteps in the morning newspaper, and confront them through the web. Israel has mastery over the language of the Western media, which, again, helped create a parallel reality that has little correlation to the real world, that of facts, numbers and actual events. That alternative universe only exists on newspaper editorial pages, in mega-churches and in the blabber of Fox News “experts”.

There is no serious or equitable debate regarding Palestine and Israel in the US corporate media, nor in any other US cultural, political and religious circles. If the existing narrative is to be called a debate, then it’s one with an imagined, not real, language, almost entirely irrelevant to realities in Palestine and Israel; one that is largely predicated on a narrow minded, apocalyptic religious discourse that for decades has found itself an accepted point of departure for most politicians, even those who falsely pose as liberals.

Between the two discourses, that of misguided religious fantasies and pandering politicians, there maybe exists enough room for alternative narratives. Unfortunately, that space too is overwhelmed by cultural misconceptions, institutional bias and deliberate confusion introduced and instilled by media producers, pundits and other manufacturers of American popular culture.

Until the gatekeepers of US culture are seriously challenged, Palestine will continue to reside in American imagination as a battle between good and evil, a “Holy Land” that must be wrested from the hands of those who might have owned the land, at some point, but now “haven’t any business to be there defiling it.”

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