By Jan Kapusnak

Infantilization also operates through ventriloquism. In progressive activist and media milieus, Palestinians are routinely narrated rather than heard. Outsiders declare what Palestinians “really want,” which voices are “authentic,” and which opinions can be dismissed as coerced or unrepresentative. Agency becomes conditional – recognized when it points in the “right” direction.

This dynamic ends up laundering Hamas’s worldview. In parts of the Western pro-Palestinian milieu, Hamas’s language of “resistance” is normalized, its authoritarianism softened, and Palestinians who call for reform, coexistence, or an end to Hamas rule are pushed to the margins – while maximalist slogans and a cult of “martyrdom” are treated as the only authentic register of Palestinian politics. When Gazans protest Hamas, the story often evaporates. In March 2025, rare demonstrations in northern Gaza featured chants of “Hamas out” and calls to end the war; one protester told Arab media, “They destroyed our lives. They rule us with fear.”

The same selective silence appears when Hamas brands dissenters as “collaborators” and punishes them – sometimes publicly and lethally: much of the activist scene falls conspicuously quiet, and in some corners even the category of “traitor” is treated as a legitimate feature of “liberation politics”. Anti-Hamas Palestinians exist and deserve far more attention than Western infantilization scripts allow.

NGO’s under Hamas’ control

The humanitarian and human-rights NGO ecosystem can reinforce Palestinian infantilization by portraying Palestinians almost exclusively as aid recipients, patients and trauma victims. NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research institute, has argued for years that in the Israel–Palestinian arena many influential NGOs operate less as neutral fact-finders than as political actors: producing one-sided, prosecutorial narratives with weak verifiability, assigning Israel full intentionality and legal culpability while treating Hamas as background “militants,” not a ruling authority with duties to civilians. NGO Monitor’s December 2025 report, “Puppet Regime: Hamas’ Coercive Grip on Aid and NGO Operations in Gaza,” drawing on internal Hamas documents, argues that Hamas systematically monitored and controlled foreign NGOs and aid operations – underscoring why it is misleading to present Gaza as pure victimhood without power structures.

That is why Hamas's *Our Narrative* explicitly emphasizes maintaining ties with liberal actors worldwide who "stood with the Palestinians against the occupation," while urging efforts to prevent normalization with Israel and to keep pursuing Israel in international courts and forums.

Infantilization does not stop at Gaza. In the West Bank, it takes a quieter form: the Palestinian Authority is treated less as a governing regime than as a fragile humanitarian placeholder. Mahmoud Abbas has led the PA since 2005; his electoral mandate expired in 2009, and no presidential or parliamentary elections have been held since. In this world Israel becomes the default explanation for democratic absence; Palestinian leadership choices become a secondary detail. Polls repeatedly show deep public frustration – large majorities want Abbas to resign, and corruption is widely seen as endemic – yet the PA retains diplomatic legitimacy and substantial donor support with limited pressure for transparency and reform. It signals to Palestinian elites that power can be retained without renewal, while reformers are told that accountability can be postponed indefinitely.

"Nakba" – when the "infantilization" of the Palestinians started

Infantilization also works retroactively – through history. The Nakba (Arabic for "catastrophe," the term for the 1948 war and displacement) is often narrated in Western discourse as something that simply befell Palestinians in 1948, with too little attention to the preceding political choice: the rejection of the 1947 UN Partition Plan and the decision by Arab leaders to wage war to prevent any Jewish state. That was not an unavoidable chain reaction; it was a strategic gamble with predictable consequences – and had it succeeded, it is hard to imagine the Jewish community emerging safely under the forces and rhetoric mobilized against it. Yet once the gamble failed, defeat was coded as pure victimhood and responsibility pushed outward.

In 1990–91, the PLO under Yasser Arafat backed Saddam Hussein after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait – a choice that put Palestinian leadership on the wrong side of a defining international rupture and carried severe costs for Palestinians in the Gulf. Lasting for decades, chronic rejectionism toward multiple diplomatic openings is likewise softened into inevitability rather than treated as strategy with consequences. And when Arab-Israeli normalization advanced through the Abraham Accords, most of the Palestinian leadership condemned it as betrayal – reinforcing a politics of refusal over state-building. Hamas, for its part, treated normalization as a strategic threat and the October 7 massacre was aimed, among other goals, at

derailing the prospect of Israel–Saudi normalization. In each case, consequential choices are narrated as though Palestinians had none – and the result is historical amnesia: Palestinians are cast as history's passengers, not its drivers.

If one genuinely wants Palestinian statehood, one should insist on political adulthood: accountable rulers, replaceable leaders, institutions over Islamist terror groups and a moral vocabulary that does not romanticize a cult of death. That also means facing a central obstacle to peace: enduring dominant currents in Palestinian society that do not seek coexistence with Israel but its erasure. Pretending this aspiration is marginal – or merely a metaphor – is not solidarity; it is costly self-deception.

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