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# Trends. The Error of the Fundamental Attribution Error: The Character Assassinations of Sharon and Arafat

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Is Ariel Sharon a bellicose, militaristic leader who seeks the demise of Yasir Arafat like Captain Ahab going after Moby Dick? Is Yasir Arafat a lying, conniving leader who seeks the destruction of the State of Israel? Such questions imply that these leaders possess personal dispositions or traits that fuel political decisionmaking.

Some political psychologists, instead, would opine that a leader's political decisionmaking is much more significantly influenced by situational factors--e.g., historical, social, cultural, economic, and immediate event-driven phenomena. Still other political psychologists would posit a person-situation interaction for the causal trail bearing on political decisionmaking.

However, it is the language related to such attributional options that may most constrain some resolution of causality. The person is inevitably socially constructed as the situation is inevitably constructed dependent on cognition, affect, and motivation. In other words, stating that the person is the situation and the situation is the person is more than an obfuscation, pompous irrelevance, or catchy aphorism.

As to Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat, attributing benign or malignant intentions is as moot as attributing the leaders as hopefully or hopelessly snared in forces not of their making or totally in their control. Language serves functions that are categorical and instrumental including that which is propagandistic. The notion that language is the route to some so-called objective Reality or Truth is itself categorical, instrumental, and propagandistic--as much so as character assassination. (See Armstrong, G. B., & Kaplowitz, S. A. (2001). Sociolinguistic inference and intercultural coorientation: A Bayesian model of communicative competence in intercultural interaction. *Human Communication Research*, 27, 350-381; Hogan, R. (2001). Wittgenstein was right. *Psychological Inquiry*, 12, 27; Krull, D. S., Loy, M. H-M, Lin, J., Wang, C-F, Chen, S., & Zhao, X. (1999). The fundamental attribution error: Correspondence bias in individualist and collectivist cultures. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25, 1208-1219; Ross, L.D. (2001). Getting down to fundamentals: Lay dispositionism and the attributions of psychologists. *Psychological Inquiry*, 12, 37-40; Weber, R., Camerer, C., Rottenstreich, Y., & Knez, M. (2001). The illusion of leadership: Misattribution of cause in coordination games. *Organization Science*, 12, 582-598.) (Keywords: Ariel Sharon, Character Assassination, Israel, Middle East, Palestine, Political Communication, Yasir Arafat.)