

Gaza: The Massacre of Modernity

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Abstract:

The debate on modernity and authenticity persists in Arab thought without reaching clear answers. This paper shifts the discussion from philosophy to sociology by exploring the global outcomes of Western modernity. Using the Gaza war as a case study, we examined events, positions, and historical references to evaluate modernity's ethical foundation. Our analysis revealed a crucial difference: ethical commitments of competing projects. We argue that Gaza represents not an accidental but a structural failure of modernity, comparable to the Holocaust, exposing its inability to uphold genuine ethical responsibility

Key words: modernity – authenticity – outcomes – ethic – Massacre.

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1. INTRODUCTION

From the late nineteenth century until the present, the topic of the Renaissance in the Islamic world has been the focus of heated and ongoing discussions. The relationship with religion has perhaps been the most important area of disagreement. Those who sought to emulate Western civilization called for a separation from religion, as Europe had done; by distancing itself from religion, Europe achieved tremendous scientific progress that facilitated human life and enhanced well-being. On the other hand, some fundamentally reject this view, arguing that Islam itself elevated Muslims to the level of civilization, and that abandoning it would inevitably lead them into decline.

Neither side has been able to persuade the other of the validity of its position, since the disagreement is fundamentally ideological. Depending on the subjectivity and ideology of each side, two completely different interpretations of the same historical event or logical argument may exist. Therefore, we must look for another type of analytical tool and go beyond purely philosophical debate to determine the applicability of both viewpoints for Islamic society.

We will therefore introduce what can be called the "outcome probe": the destiny of the philosophical project within social reality. If the West's progress is credited to its departure from religion, by adopting rationality as both a guiding principle and a source of knowledge, as well as a way to achieve goals. In that case, we must consider the effects of such progress. In other words, we shift from philosophical debate to social reality, focusing our inquiry on the sociology of modernity in the Arab world. Therefore, we ask: What ultimately do modernity and authenticity aim to achieve?

2. Observations on the Gaza War

The conflict in Palestine offers a clear and comprehensive view of the results of two distinct projects: modernity (used here as a broad concept that includes both modernity and postmodernity) and authenticity.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, along with other resistance factions in Gaza, launched an attack on Israel as part of what they called the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation. According to the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, during the first two months of the conflict, 1,538 Israelis were killed and over 5,000 were injured. Between 200 and 250 prisoners were detained by the al-Qassam Brigades, according to Hamas spokesperson Abu Ubaida, who also said that Israeli bombardment had killed dozens of the captives.

As of January 31, 2024, The Times of Israel reported that 223 Israeli soldiers had died (ALJazeera, 2024)

Israel started a war to defeat Hamas and reclaim its prisoners. The humanitarian and health situation in the Gaza Strip seems dire after 22 months of continuous fighting. Data from the Ministry of Health reveal the scale of the catastrophe: more than 60,000 martyrs, approximately 31% of whom are children, and over 150,000 injured since the beginning of the assault. Two-thirds of hospitals are now out of service, diagnostic and surgical equipment has been drastically reduced, and essential medicines have disappeared from pharmacy shelves, leaving 300,000 chronic patients in direct confrontation with hunger and disease (banna, 2025)

Israel has received military, political, and economic support from Western countries, foremost among them the United States of America, initially under the leadership of Democrat Joe Biden, and subsequently under his successor, Republican Donald Trump.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United States provided Israel with military aid amounting to 22 billion dollars from the beginning of the assault on Gaza on October 7, 2023, until August 2024. During this period, Washington delivered 50,000 tons of weaponry to Israel, including precision-guided missiles, bombs, attack helicopters, and armored vehicles. (Al Jazeera mubasher, 2025)

Western international positions were largely supportive of Israel; however, after the rising number of Palestinian casualties, mass

demonstrations erupted across numerous countries, particularly in the West, in protest against Israel's actions.

The Palestinian-European Media Center (EPAL) documented nearly 42,000 demonstrations and events in support of the Palestinian cause across more than 700 cities in 20 European countries, following the genocidal war waged by the Israeli occupation on the Gaza Strip for approximately 675 days. (Al Jazeera , 2025)

Despite all these demonstrations and events condemning the killing of Palestinians, Western political circles remained unaffected, despite being among the largest and oldest democracies in the world.

The United Nations denounced Israel's actions, and the International Court of Justice also issued its ruling, a ruling that the UN would call "historic", on July 19, 2024, which ruled that Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was unlawful, as was the settlement regime associated with it, the annexation of land, and the exploitation of natural resources. The Court held that Israeli laws and practices are a violation of the international prohibition of segregation and apartheid. The ICJ ordered Israel to end its occupation, dismantle its settlements, pay full reparations to Palestinian victims, and allow displaced persons to return. (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024)

This, from the perspective of general events, leads us now to a discussion of these developments in order to address our central question.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION :

Examinations of the Gaza War

The Palestinian cause is regarded as a central issue for the Arab world, as Arab states have waged wars against the Jews in an attempt to reclaim Palestine. Arab societies view Israel as an entity created by the West in the Arab region on the basis of the Balfour Declaration. From this awareness, Arabs, both elites and societies, recognize the

West's bias toward Israel and witness firsthand how modernity treats them. From the West's position on Israel, we can discern a bleak image of the fate of modernity:

- Arrogance, hubris, and hatred: Israeli scholar Neve Gordon, who specializes in international law and human rights, has argued that Israel often denies Palestinians their very humanity, portraying them as inherently immoral. Such rhetoric extends to the highest political circles. Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, for instance, referred to the enemy as "animals," while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Gaza as a "City of Evil." On social media, similar imagery persists: Palestinians are compared to "rats" or "snakes," a language that, as Medet observes, serves to strip them of humanity and create a moral framework that normalizes violence against civilians. (Medet, 2023)
- Double standards and preferential treatment among peoples: In the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, Western states side with Ukraine against Russia on the grounds that Russia is the aggressor, while those same states stand with Israel against the Palestinians, despite Israel being the aggressor. U.S. President Joe Biden has continued to openly support Israel and deliberately refrained from publicly criticizing it, even as the number of Palestinian martyrs has surpassed

Despite Israel's aggression claiming more than thirty-two thousand lives, it was only after the Israeli army bombed a convoy belonging to the World Central Kitchen on April 2, 2024, killing six foreign nationals along with a Palestinian, that the Israeli Prime Minister faced open and direct criticism, as well as pressure in the ongoing negotiations over the release of Israeli captives. According to CNN Arabic (CNN arabic, 2024), a senior U.S. administration official said Wednesday that President Joe Biden has become increasingly angry and frustrated since an Israeli airstrike killed seven aid workers from the World Central Kitchen in Gaza. The pressure from the United States and other Western nations to return Israeli prisoners held by the

resistance since October 7 while keeping quiet about the appalling conditions under which Israel has imprisoned Palestinians for decades is another example of this unequal treatment of human life.

One might argue that what happened was just an individual mistake, unrelated to the path of modern society. Perhaps leaders misjudged a specific situation at a certain time, which does not necessarily show the broader picture of civilization. It may also be suggested that they faced certain pressures, such as those from Jewish lobbies globally. While these possibilities can't be ignored, there are other historical examples that highlight the terrible aspects of modernity's path, particularly illustrated by colonialism and the Holocaust.

To understand colonialism, we need to analyze colonial discourse. According to Bill Ashcroft and others, it is an outdated classification system that sees some cultures as inherently inferior. The relationship between colonizers and the colonized follows a strict hierarchy that prevents fair exchanges in cultural, social, or economic terms (Ashcroft, Griffith, & Tiffin, 2010, pp. 106-107)

Colonial discourse is based on a simple division: the "self," or the center, seen as advanced and civilized, versus the "other," or the periphery, viewed as backward and inferior. In this strict hierarchy, movement from the periphery to the center or the other way around cannot happen. Instead, this hierarchy allows the center to exploit the periphery in every possible way, without needing any moral justification.

From this perspective, it becomes clearer why the United States, together with Israel and certain European states, disregards the resolutions of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the Human Rights Council, and various humanitarian organizations, even going so far as to seek the defunding of UNRWA in Gaza. The issue concerns people belonging to a marginal culture, one deemed external to the Western civilizational domain, echoing Defense Minister Gallant's public statement describing them as "animals who do not deserve water, food, or medicine."

Another example, no less significant, of modern practices is the Holocaust, as analyzed by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who devoted an extensive and unprecedented study to the genocide of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis during World War II. Bauman regarded the Holocaust as a sociological laboratory, a rare test that reveals the latent potentials of modern society. The main idea of his book is that the Holocaust was not an outlier in modern history but a direct result of it. It happened at the height of modern development. Bauman argues that the issue stems from modernity's neglect of ethics, even though it is based on reason. Among the most salient points in his book, which are relevant to our discussion, are the following (Bauman, 2014, pp. 65-86):

The way destruction happened was similar to the organized structure of German society as a whole. In fact, it was society itself fulfilling one of its roles. The Holocaust did not go against the principles of rationality. The idea of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" did not clash with the clear and effective pursuit of achieving set goals. On the contrary, it emerged out of a genuinely rational concern and was the product of a bureaucratic system aligned with both method and purpose. The choice of physical extermination of the Jews came only after all other options had been exhausted. Extermination, as the most effective means of eliminating Jews, was the outcome of routine bureaucratic procedures; it was nothing more than a calculated assessment of means and ends, as well as budgetary considerations.

Herbert Kelman answers the question of how ordinary Germans became perpetrators of a major crime by noting that moral restraints against atrocities tend to vanish once certain bureaucratic conditions are in place. Sociologist Max Weber captured this dynamic by stating that a civil servant's sense of honor is tied to faithfully executing the directives of their superiors, committing to those orders with the same conviction as if they were their own. It makes no difference if the orders appear flawed, or if the authorities insist on them despite objections, the civil servant regards obedience as the highest form of

moral discipline and self-denial. In this way, delegitimizing anything that contradicts internal organizational rules as a standard of correctness and self-protection became the supreme moral virtue, even if it meant denying the authority of human conscience.

It thus becomes clear that the suppression of morality was its primary concern. In fact, it was the essential precondition for its success as a tool of rational coordination of action. Rubinstein observes that the world of the camps and the society it generated exposes the intensification of the darker side of Judeo-Christian civilization. If "civilization" refers to systems of public health, lofty religious ideas, fine art, and delicate music, it also refers to slavery, wars, exploitation, and death camps. It is, therefore, a grave mistake to assume that civilization and barbarism are opposites. In our time, barbaric acts, like most other aspects of our world, are subjected to unprecedentedly efficient administration. Creativity and destruction, in this sense, are inseparable facets of what we call civilization.

Leo Kuper further argues that the nation-state claimed, as an inherent component of its sovereignty, the right to commit genocide and to perpetrate massacres against populations under its control.

It becomes clear, through the examination of colonialism and the Holocaust, that what is happening today in Gaza is neither an exception nor a deviation from context; rather, it is an inherent continuation of Western modernity practices. The genocide, displacement, and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians reflect historical patterns seen in other societies. These actions receive direct support from the state and are backed by theories and ideas from scholars and intellectuals. This shows that these practices are not random; they are deeply embedded in the structure of the modernist project.

Thus, it becomes clear that Muslim intellectual elites have reached a number of conclusions about modernity, most notably:

The marginal position of non-Western societies: Intellectual elites and their communities are classified as the "Other," excluded from the center. They are denied the right to develop or to keep pace with the

center, since their backwardness and deficiency are deemed intrinsic, while the advancement of the center is considered an essential, self-sustained feature.

The emptiness of proclaimed universal values: All the values and human rights promoted by Western civilization have failed to withstand the logic of the "Self–Other" binary it created. The West stands with Israel despite its blatant violations of human rights and international law, simply because Israel belongs to the domain of the "Self." Conversely, it opposes Palestine, despite its evident injustice and the legitimacy of its resistance to occupation, merely because it is categorized as the "Other."

Double standards: The so-called universal values, presented as absolute and general, are in fact used selectively, serving only Western interests rather than the interests of all people around the globe.

From this perspective, the realities exposing the fate of modernity can be summed up in one central idea: the separation from morality. Instead of making human beings more civilized, modernity has stripped them of ethics, which in turn has rendered them more savage and brutal.

Let us now examine, from another perspective, how the people of Gaza have dealt with the war:

- Despite the massive destruction caused by Israeli bombardment, Palestine's Environmental Quality Authority stated that the explosives dropped by the Israeli army on the Gaza Strip exceeded those used during World War II, amounting to more than 85,000 tons by November 2024 (Russia Today, 2024), and despite the staggering death toll, with an average of more than 90 martyrs per day over twenty-two consecutive months, as well as the ongoing Israeli blockade that restricts the entry of humanitarian aid such as food, medicine, and water, Gazans confront their reality with patience and steadfastness. Their Islamic faith enables them to endure difficult times and even deepens their optimism about reclaiming their land

and achieving justice. They refuse forced displacement despite bombardment and starvation, and they remain firmly attached to their dream of return and the liberation of Jerusalem.

- The resistance demonstrated humane treatment toward the prisoners it held, despite them being its enemies, in accordance with its Islamic principles. Global media captured footage of female captives waving their hands with broad smiles at resistance fighters during prisoner exchange operations, an image particularly striking given that women are generally more sensitive and affected by the conditions of captivity.

- The resistance derives its strength from the justice of its cause and from Islamic faith. Despite being confined within a small geographic area under siege, they refused submission and humiliation, instead developing innovative and effective methods to confront their enemy, such as underground tunnels.

- The resistance also made use of certain products of modernity, such as weapons, communication tools, and media platforms, in ways that serve its cause.

These points can be summarized in a single idea: commitment to ethics.

An objection may arise, suggesting that the resistance might simply be skillfully employing such principles to advance its cause and market it globally. To verify the validity of this claim, we turn to other historical evidence, namely periods when Muslims were at the height of their power, to examine whether they maintained this ethical commitment.

During the Islamic conquests, Muslims transformed the cities they entered into thriving centers of civilization. The conquerors intermingled with the native populations through intermarriage, and they did not construct social hierarchies on racial or cultural grounds as Western colonizers later did. These cities flourished and left a lasting legacy for humanity, such as Baghdad, al-Andalus, and al-

Sham, in stark contrast to colonialism, which entrenched backwardness in all its colonies.

Here, ethical commitment appears to be more closely tied to Islamic culture than to its Western counterpart, something clearly observable in the war on Gaza.

4. CONCLUSION

Accordingly, Muslims today are faced with a renewed debate between modernity and authenticity. Yet, unlike earlier intellectual debates, this one is taking place on the battlefield of Gaza. Its actors are the Palestinians on the one hand and the West in its entirety on the other. Its language is a mixture of gunpowder and blood, and its central theme is ethics.

Those concerned with the question of modernity will thus be compelled to choose between two moral frameworks: the ethics of Western arrogance, detached from any religious foundation, or the ethics of dignity and integrity, rooted in Islam.

In this sense, Gaza may be regarded as the slaughterhouse of Western modernity in two meanings:

- Gaza is the victim of Western arrogance, as though modernity itself has slaughtered Gaza.
- Gaza has also exposed the hollowness of modernity's slogans, as though modernity itself has been slaughtered in Gaza.

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