

Between Civilization and Barbarism

by [Nikos Akritas](#) (January 2024)



Battle on the Bridge, by Arnold Böcklin, 1892

Benjamin Netanyahu has referred to the Israel-Hamas conflict as a war for civilization. Rhetoric one assumes, and so it may be. But scratch beneath the surface and examine the fundamentals of what is at stake and you really do find a conflict between civilization and barbarism, freedom and repression, reason and ignorance.

What many in the West fail to realize is although their societies have largely moved on from homo *religiosus* to homo

economicus, other societies have not. Theirs is a completely different mindset. It is one of opposition to rationality in the name of faith. There are those who mistakenly assume the progress of Western societies from a similar position, to what we have today, is a logically conclusive outcome and that all societies follow a similar path of progress. But there is no linear progression of societies towards a teleological conclusion (as the faithful–religious or secular–would have it) and values the West holds dear are met with hostility in other parts of the world.

Existential conflict may have disappeared amongst Western nations but not in parts of the world that still operate under *homo religiosus* (under this term I include all ideology which is adhered to as a matter of faith, even if professed secular; maybe a better term would be *homo ideologicus*). The oppression of religious mandate and opposition to reason and secular freedoms is still the stark reality in most Muslim (and all communist) countries. The danger for Western civilization is that these anachronisms are being exported back to it, by exploiting concepts of Western freedom and using them against liberal society. If one values freedom of the individual to think, speak and act without fear, one has to recognize the danger of intolerance returning in the guise of minority rights.

Groups, religious or otherwise, that call for apartheid on any basis, the suppression of women, execution of homosexuals and anybody who opposes their views, are not groups that deserve protections they themselves do not believe in. If, as in the case of Hamas, religious bigotry translates into death for infidels, they themselves should be judged by their own standards. I do not mean religious bigots should be wiped out in the same way they would wipe out those who do not subscribe to their beliefs but by rejecting liberal values, they themselves should not benefit from them.

When chants of “from the river to the sea” are gleefully sung

in public spaces, the genocide yearned for may not be a violent action in itself but it is incitement to violence when there exist Islamist groups willing to take action, and have done, in accord with such sentiments. Calls for *judenrein* by antisemitic groups are rightfully abhorred and have no place in civilized society. Or are they? In fact, it is only some antisemitic groups that are detested?

“From the river to the sea” is, in essence, a call for *judenrein* in the Middle East. Why do some believe this is ok, or find it difficult to criticize? Because it forms the basis of an ideology that pertains to a non-Western part of the world and liberal Western sensibilities have been so saturated with guilt they cannot bring themselves to criticize anything non-Western, for fear they themselves might be viewed as racists (witness the decades-long failure to act over Muslim grooming gangs in the UK). And so, in fear of being labelled racist, liberals allow the religious extremism they themselves are free of to continue suppressing and slaughtering others. It is not racism and bigotry per se that liberals are opposed to, it is only Western racism and bigotry they challenge.

When liberals, ignorant of the historical details, support the Palestinian cause, what is that cause exactly? The return of people calling themselves Palestinians to lands now within Israel? It may surprise many to know that Israel’s population is over 20% Arab. Yet the Jewish population of other Middle Eastern and north African countries is virtually zero. It may also surprise these people to know more Jews were displaced from Muslim countries over opposition to Israel than Palestinians were displaced from the land now known as Israel.

What of the term Palestinian itself? What and where is Palestine? The Mandate of Palestine consisted of what is today known as Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and Jordan. Therefore, all peoples living in these areas (Muslims, Christians, Jews and Druze) were, if one insists on the term, Palestinians. Why is it the term Palestinian today excludes Jews? Pre-Israel the

population referred to itself through Jewish or Arab markers of identity. There were calls for an Arab state and a Jewish state. An Arab state was created from the majority of this territory. That it is called Jordan, rather than Palestine, has only served to obfuscate the issue for the ignorant. To claim the rest of the Mandate should have been Palestine means two Arab states should have been formed and no Jewish one. This recognizes self-determination for one group of people and not the other.

If the matter is to be reduced in such a way, which group deserves our support? The group which functions along democratic lines, which by the mere presence of such a large ethnic minority exemplifies its liberal values? Or the group which does not tolerate diversity, believes a woman's place is inferior to that of a man's and that homosexuals are an abomination to be wiped off the face of the earth?

How do we arrive at such different world-views in the first place? Essentially, one society attempts to organize itself on the basis of reason and on laws arrived at through debate and deliberation. The other organizes itself according to religious mandate, on 'revealed' laws which are not open to debate and in which a person's place in society is fixed purely on the basis of their gender, sexual preference or religious orientation. Which type of society is more conducive to civilization? Which is more conducive to equality and freedom? Which one, basically, would you prefer to live in?

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