



## (Geo)culture and the West's War Against Gaza

**Peter Wilkin**

*Brunel University of London*

[peter.wilkin@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:peter.wilkin@brunel.ac.uk)

### Abstract

*This paper examines the challenges to the dominant Western geoculture of the modern world-system posed by the ongoing war on Gaza. Historically, the West's geocultural power has seen it successfully construct, maintain, and defend a self-image as one in which it represents an international community which adheres to universal liberal values: human rights, international law, and the use of force in international relations only when sanctioned by law. However, the ongoing war on Gaza (which is best viewed as a war undertaken by the West, not simply Israel) has exposed the West's actions to unprecedented critical scrutiny. The paper argues that the traditional mechanisms by which the West has built and maintained its geocultural dominance (media, education, intellectual culture) have been undermined in the digital age by the proliferation of new media forms. In short, the West has struggled to control the narrative that Israel is defending civilization against barbarism. The reality, as many critics have noted, is the opposite—the West defends barbarism against civilization.*

**Keywords:** Geoculture, Gaza, Israel, Western civilization, Palestine, Genocide



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“The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion... but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.”

Samuel Huntington (1996: 93).

This paper is concerned with the “culture wars” that have been a prominent feature of political conflict over the past decade, mainly but not exclusively in the core nation-states of the modern world-system. In spatial terms the core incorporates the Western allied nation-states that have dominated the construction and colonization of the modern world-system: Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. The culture wars have been represented by sections of the West’s intelligentsia as being a conflict between the defenders of Western civilization and its universal liberal values, and those who would destroy them (Scruton 2002; Steyn 2006; Roberts 2010; Ferguson 2012a, 2012b; Stokes 2018; Murray 2022; Bigger 2023; Gilley 2023; Lester 2023; Truss 2024). In part they have been triggered by attempts by social justice groups in the West to challenge racism and sexism through such things as cancelling public talks by figures deemed to be racist, sexist, or fascist; but also by extending the meaning of oppression into multiple forms of identity which are viewed as being subject to institutional forms of discrimination (Stokes 2023, 2024; Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings 2023).

The culture wars, then, can be seen as taking two different forms (at least): first, a war between Western civilization and its non-Western enemies; and second, a conflict within Western civilization between those claiming to be the defenders of universal liberal freedoms and those that are seen as a threat to them—the latter usually situated on the political left or the right. However, it has become increasingly clear over the past decade that the institutional defenders of Western civilization can incorporate far right and neofascist political parties and social movements into their alliance, but not radical left parties. Indeed, neo-fascist parties have in many instances become enthusiastic supporters of neoliberalism, Israel, and Zionism as their ideology has shifted from antisemitism to anti-Islam (Landau 2012). However, this paper addresses two specific questions that situate the issue of the culture wars in the context of the decline of Western power in the world-system and its ongoing transformation in the twenty-first century; namely what do the culture wars mean from a world-systems perspective, and in what ways does the current Western war on Gaza inform an understanding of the (geo)culture wars?

The argument made in the paper is twofold. First, that the culture wars are also part of what world-systems scholars call the *geocultural* conflicts that have shaped the world-system since the French revolution. The geoculture is the realm where governing elites of the core have historically sought to construct dominant and legitimizing narratives about their own history and actions in the world-system. Thus, the concept of geoculture refers to the emergence of an ideological framework in the core which became a basis for understanding social and political change (Wallerstein 1991, 2011; el-Ojeili 2015). As Wallerstein argued, this saw the emergence of three main political ideologies: liberalism, socialism, and conservatism. It was what he called “centrist liberalism” which came to dominate the geoculture of the system. Centrist liberalism presented an ideological

outlook which rested upon the belief in progress, the normality of political change through elections, a defense of capitalism, the importance of piecemeal social reform, and a universal normative framework which was embedded in international law (Wallerstein 2011).<sup>1</sup> For Wallerstein, both socialism and conservatism adapted to the dominance of liberal ideas. Thus, a geocultural framework serves to provide guidance for governing elites of the core nation-states on politics, law, morality, economics, and social policy. It has also served to place the West at the center of conceptions of modernity and progress (Conrad 2012). Allied to this has been the idea that the West's norms and ideas diffused outwards to the rest of the world (usually through colonialism), helping others to raise their quality of life and extending democracy to the world (Blaut 2012).

Since the end of the Cold War this framework has seen two new narratives emerge from the core which have come to dominate the elite-level geoculture of the West, neither of which conform to the ambitions of centrist liberalism. This change in the geoculture of the West reflects the profound geopolitical and economic transformation ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet bloc 1989–1991. These two new narratives have been: the *neoliberal* idea of the end of history and the triumph of the market; and the argument associated with Samuel Huntington (1996), the “Clash of Civilizations.”<sup>2</sup> Although offering contrasting understandings of the post-Cold War era both presuppose the dominance of the West in terms of progress and ideas, and both reject the kind of mixed economy and social compromise associated with centrist liberalism. The *neoliberal* view defends the idea that the West's ideas and norms are universal and good for all peoples—it valorizes a particular conception of the importance of the market and finance capitalism over industrial capitalism, society, and the state (Blyth 2013; Hudson 2021). The “Clash” thesis, by contrast, starts from a concern with geopolitics and culture rather than economics and says that Western norms are culturally specific and incommensurable with those of other civilizations (Huntington 1996; Haynes 2019). It rejects the idea that international law and universal human rights can lay the foundation for a cosmopolitan and universal international system. Indeed, this latter point is central to the differences between these two geocultural narratives. The neoliberal view presupposes that the world can be more peaceful and prosperous if there is a spread of democracy, capitalism, and universal liberal values (Doyle 1997). By contrast, the Clash thesis argues that the incommensurable values of civilizations, including the West, means that conflict is inevitable. Capitalism, democracy, and liberal values cannot be diffused to non-Western cultures as they have different value systems which are incompatible with it (Huntington 1996; Haynes 2019; Wilkin 2023).

The relative decline of the West in the twenty-first century in terms of political, economic, and military power has in addition been fueled by *geocultural* challenges to its ideological self-

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<sup>1</sup> Ideology here is used in the sense of being a coherent set of beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> Huntington's thesis has become a staple of far right and neofascist ultranationalist movements across the world-system. Huntington himself has been a public intellectual associated with mainstream political thought and played a prominent political role in the liberal U.S. Carter Administration.

image. As former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted in testimony before the Senate Foreign Policy Priorities Committee in 2011,

we are in an information war and we are losing that war... Al Jazeera is winning. The Chinese have opened up a global English language and multi-language television network, the Russians have opened up an English language network. I've seen it in a couple of countries and it's quite instructive (Lubin 2011).

Where once the West dominated the geoculture of the modern world-system, now, as Clinton notes, powerful states of the semi-periphery are challenging this dominance through the expansion of their own media platforms. The West's commitment to the liberalization of media markets since the 1980s had been premised, in part, on the fact that Western media outlets dominated the global productions of news and popular culture at the time and would be able to exploit these new markets in search of higher profits into the twenty-first century (Holt 2011). This geocultural dominance now faces severe challenges and in part explains important aspects of the geoculture wars.

Second, the paper argues that the culture wars, when viewed as geocultural conflicts, reflect the West's increasingly strained attempts to shore up its self-image as the moral and political leader of an "international community"—the upholder of universal norms and international law (Ikenberry 2009; Ikenberry, Parmar, and Stokes 2018). The digital revolution, as Clinton acknowledged, has undermined the ability of the West's governing institutions to shape the media narratives about its role in the world-system. The West's defense of international law and human rights has been exposed to global public opinion in ways which have made it appear hypocritical and indifferent to human suffering. Worse, it is actively supporting the war on Gaza whilst at the same time claiming to be working to end it. A consequence of this has been that people around the world bypass the mainstream media in search of information about the conflict from social media (Spitka 2023). The geocultural problem the West faces is that its unequivocal defense of and support for the Israeli war against the Palestinians has revealed its deeper geopolitical interests, which are less to do with its commitment to liberal values, and more to do with the defense of its increasingly challenged power and control over the world-system.

The paper proceeds by setting out the ways in which the West has built its geocultural self-image before clarifying the ways in which the ongoing war on Palestine has undermined this. The war on Gaza represents a potential turning point in the ongoing transformation of the modern world-system in the twenty-first century as China and other parts of the semi-periphery and periphery develop new relations to try to circumvent the power of the United States and its Western allies.

### **Geoculture as a Concept: Strengths and Limitations**

“We are in a competition for influence with China; let's put aside the moral, humanitarian, do-good side of what we believe in, and let's just talk straight realpolitik.”

Hillary Clinton, 2011 (Seib 2011)

The dominant geoculture of the modern world-system since World War II has argued that there is an international community led by the United States that defends human rights, the rule of law and a rules-based international order (Ikenberry 2009; Stokes 2018). In the aftermath of World War II, this was presented as a war against communism—in the twenty-first century it is presented by many as being in defense of Western civilization and universal liberal values (Saull 2012; Stokes 2023, 2024). This is presented as an international community that eschews the use of force in international relations unless guided by international law and is sanctioned by the UN Security Council, and one which promotes democracy and aid to those in need (Doyle 1997; Ikenberry 2018). As Hillary Clinton said, this picture represents the moral, do-good side of what the West stands for. Anti-imperialist critics that have also been a part of the geoculture wars have challenged this self-portrait, arguing that it is a self-serving and largely Eurocentric understanding of world history that supports and legitimizes the destructive power of the West (the core of the world-system) (Amin 1989; Tharoor 2016; Patnaik and Patnaik 2021).

The question that arises is how did the West's self-image come to be established? How was the West able to construct an account of its own history which says, for example, that whilst it has made mistakes which it regrets (colonialism, the Vietnam war) the basic direction of the West has always been as Clinton suggests, to act morally and follow the “do-good” path of action — in short, to uphold international law, the rule of law, and human rights (Stokes 2023)?

To explain this, I will set out the three main generative mechanisms which have enabled the West to construct a dominant geocultural framework for the world-system up until the twenty-first century: one, its control of the production of global news and communication; two, the power and reach of Western intellectual culture when viewed as presenting a universal account of world history; and three, the shaping of global education through the legacy of colonialism.

All of these have been challenged in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by increasingly assertive institutions and antisystemic movements across the world-system, as Clinton noted earlier. Fundamental to this has been the digital revolution which, as the paper argues, has generated a qualitative shift in the production and consumption of news, images, and communication. This represents a move away from vertical systems of knowledge which have historically been dominated by the institutions of the core nation-states, and towards increasingly horizontal networks of information which attempt resist the control of the state and corporate power (Castells 2013; Bhandari 2023).

As noted in the introduction, the concept of a geoculture was developed by Wallerstein as a way of framing the dominant ideological narratives that have been produced by the core as a means for legitimizing its actions and power in the world-system (Wallerstein 2011; El-ojeili 2015). In this respect it is a concern with the ideological frameworks that are shared by elite decision-making groups and institutions across the core states. Recently, Winters (2021) has argued that China's Belt and Road Initiative for the twenty-first century is a form of counter geocultural strategy aimed to challenge the West's ideological power and strengthen China's status in the twenty-first century. Winters also makes the point that as a concept geoculture has been relatively underexamined and

underutilized, from which one can conclude that rather than being passé it is in need of development and nuanced application to case studies.

Critics of world-systems analysis have argued the concept of geoculture has two critical limitations: first, that it presents culture as something that can be read off of economic relations—in short, that geoculture presents culture as an economically determined epiphenomenon (Boyne 1990; King 1991); and second, that the concept provides a deterministic view of culture and ideology which leaves little room for understanding agency and resistance in the form of antisystemic movements (Moretti 2005; Mueller and Schmidt 2019).

In response to this I think two points can be made which would help to widen and develop work on geoculture. The first is to understand that geoculture has hitherto primarily been a focus upon *elite level* ideological narratives, the shared meanings that have come to dominate the ideological perspectives of policy makers and decision makers across the core of the world-system. The limitation of geoculture, then, is better understood as its being largely used to focus upon elite level ideological struggles.

This leads to my second point which is that geocultural analysis can be usefully developed, following Winters (2021) and others, as an analysis of the struggle over the production of knowledge in the world-system and the ways in which antisystemic movements have sought to challenge dominant ideas. As Mueller and Schmidt (2019) note, this can only be realized through case studies and ethnographic research which seek to situate the concrete in the context of the world-system. If this cannot be done, then the concept is indeed of limited use empirically. This can be aided by drawing upon work in cultural political economy where culture is central to the production, reproduction and transformation of social relations, institutions, structures of power, and agency (Moulaert, Jessop, and Mehmood 2016). An important point being made here is that institutions and social structures are always the *meaningful* outcomes of actions by agents and will bear the imprint of the culture in which they are situated. Agents are never simply determined by structures—agency must have autonomy in some sense or social change would not occur. Ontologically one might say: if there are no agents, then there are no structures. A structural explanation, then, must show how structural properties that constrain *and* enable social life have been produced, reproduced, and transformed in everyday social relations and institutions and in cultural interactions through language, texts, and images. In short, they must be *denaturalized*. A focus on agency (antisystemic movements) must show how agents can act (individually or collectively) to accept, conform, challenge, or transform the meanings given to existing institutions and social relations (Moulaert, et al. 2016). This paper builds upon this point through its analysis of the ways in which the digital age has enabled actors and information in multiple forms which have served to impact popular consciousness about the West's war on Gaza and its contested meaning.

### Media and Communication Power

The first generative mechanism in the West's construction of its dominant geocultural narratives, from centrist liberalism to the current neoliberalism and Clash theses, has been its creation,



ownership, and control of the institutions that produce the news and the means of communication on a global scale. Historically, these have overwhelmingly been Western organizations or Western controlled technological developments, as has been chronicled by many scholars (Boyd-Barrett 1981; Alrabaa 1986; Hugill 1999; Thussu 2006; Hamelink 2019; Palmer 2019). On a global scale the West has dominated the production of news for much of the history of the modern world-system through its four major news agencies that have provided the raw material of news for the world's media. Associated Press (AP), Reuters (UK), Agence-France Presse (AFP), and United Press International (UPI) have dominated news production and provided a service which is a part of the West's historic ability to construct its geocultural self-image. This persisted throughout the twentieth century in opposition to Communism and the far weaker Soviet news Agency, TASS (Hachten 1993; Alleyne 1995; Bielsa 2008; Aouragh and Chakravartty 2016; Palmer 2019). This geocultural power has extended into popular culture where the West has also dominated the production of global films and TV shows, many of which have been platforms offering propagandic self-representations of the West's history—what James Der Derian (2009) has called the *military-industrial-media-entertainment complex*.

From the production of undersea telegraph cables through to satellites and the digital revolution it has been Western states and companies in alliance that have driven these innovations, and which the West has been able to own, control, and dominate (Hugill 1999; Hanna 2018; Mazzucato 2018). However, the transition from the analogue to the digital era in communication technology has altered the dependent relationship between core and periphery in ways which the West (the core) cannot so easily control and had not anticipated. The West's dominant news organizations, for example, face unprecedented challenges from emergent media institutions of the semi-periphery such as *Al Jazeera*, *Russia Today*, and TikTok that provide a counter-narrative criticizing Western power, and which has been made available to Western audiences. This has, in turn, sparked a moral panic in the West amongst its governing political classes which view these organizations as not merely providing a counter-narrative but as disseminators of fake news and false anti-Western propaganda, extending their reach into interfering in Western elections and trying to demoralize Western populations (Sparks 2014; Wasserman 2015; Amin, et al. 2000; Bratich 2020). By contrast the West's historical ability to interfere in the internal politics and elections of both Western and non-Western countries since World War II under the mantle of "democracy promotion" is rarely viewed in the same light. This is even the case when the United States and its allies have supported and condoned mass killing by allied governments—including those in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Indonesia, Rwanda, and Israel (Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi 2000; Sussman 2010; Bevins 2020; Shimer 2021). Thus, the contradiction between the West's commitment to human rights and international law and its actions has long been apparent.

The rule of law is perhaps the most powerful mechanism for defending individual liberty and equality in the modern world-system, at both the domestic and international level (Finnis 2009; Boucher 2012). The key issue here is that despite its weaknesses of enforcement, international law is still largely observed by states in everyday practices. What the war on Gaza illustrates is that when the West perceives its geopolitical and geoeconomic interests to be under threat then

international and domestic law becomes of secondary importance or can be ignored altogether. The qualitative difference is that in the twenty-first century the proliferation of digital media forms has produced an unprecedented volume of information which challenges and attempts to refute the West's self-image in real time and on a 24/7 basis. Yochai Benkler (2013) refers to these digital media as "the Networked Fourth Estate" and has argued that they will become the dominant media form for the twenty-first century.

By comparison the analogue era saw challenges to Western geocultural power more easily contained. For example, the imbalance in the flow and production of news, entertainment and information between core and periphery led to the call for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the late 1970s through the auspices of the MacBride Commission, established under UNESCO (MacBride 1980; Preston, et al. 1989). This proved to be a confrontation between newly installed neoliberal governments under President Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Thatcher in the UK, and a commission leaning heavily towards the Third World, socialism, and a critique of cultural domination by the West. The U.S. government viewed the MacBride Commission's call for a balanced flow of communication and democratic journalism as being akin to censorship and communism and left UNESCO. In so doing the United States guaranteed that the organization would be financially weakened and unable to progress with the proposals of the commission (Roach 1990; Pickard 2007).

As Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2004) has written the Western media self-image is one of being an independent Fourth Estate that scrutinizes and criticizes their own governments as they would any other, standing up to authority in defense of the public right to know (Edwards and Cromwell 2006).<sup>3</sup> As he goes on to argue, the reality has been that over time Western media have transformed into major capitalist corporations pursuing profit and that on crucial issues of what the state determines as being the national interest they tend to act as a nationalist media as opposed to being an independent one. This is a factor that journalists either embrace willingly or is one which can be brought to bear on those who might wish to go beyond the acceptable limits of criticism. On the point of the relationship between Western journalists and their nation-state former BBC reporter Kate Adie asked, "let me put the question with stark simplicity: when does a reporter sacrifice the principle of the whole truth to the need to win the war" (Allan and Zelizer 2004: 3).

On the co-optation and control of autonomous journalists who might go too far in their criticism of Western institutions, the American journalist Izzy Stone noted,

reporters tend to be absorbed by the bureaucracies they cover; they take on the habits, attitudes, and even accents of the military or the diplomatic corps. Should a reporter resist the pressure, there are many ways to get rid of him... (Stone 1963).

A good example of Stone's analysis is former BBC *Newsnight* presenter Jeremy Paxman, often viewed as one of the toughest and most critical journalists in the UK in the twenty-first

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<sup>3</sup> See Hachten (1993) for an overview of this position.



century. Paxman was responding to questions about the West's war against Iraq in 2003 and the failure of the media to scrutinize the evidence presented by the U.S. and UK governments:

As far as I personally was concerned, there came a point with the presentation of the so-called evidence, with the moment when Colin Powell sat down at the UN General Assembly and unveiled what he said was cast-iron evidence of things like mobile, biological weapon facilities and the like... When I saw all of that, I thought, well, we know that Colin Powell is an intelligent, thoughtful man, and a sceptical man. If he believes all this to be the case, then, you know, he's seen the evidence; I haven't. Now that evidence turned out to be absolutely meaningless, but we only discover that after the event. So, you know, I'm perfectly open to the accusation that we were hoodwinked. Yes, clearly we were. (MediaLens 2009)

Paxman's unwillingness to question authority is a good illustration of the point that both Stone and Boyd-Barrett are making about the danger and likelihood of Western journalists being constrained or coopted by nationalism and conformity to power. As Stone noted of his own career, to exist as a critical and independent journalist it was often necessary for journalists to work outside of the mainstream media in the West, something that the digital revolution has facilitated with multiple online media platforms challenging Western media institutions. In the context of the War on Gaza this includes such Websites as the Israeli-Palestinian +972 and the journal *Middle East Eye* (Foust 2017).

### **Epistemic Power and Western Intellectual Culture in the Construction of the Modern (Colonial) World-System**

Following Ramon Grosfoguel (2002, 2013), we can note that the second generative mechanism underpinning Western geocultural dominance of what he terms "the modern *colonial* world-system" has been its intellectual culture. The idea of a universal intellectual culture is a key manifestation of the power of the West to claim to provide historical and scientific accounts of how the world has developed and in ways which have tended to justify Western colonialism and naturalize the subordination of non-Western cultures. Mignolo (2012), Bhabra (2014), and Trouillot (2015) have noted that this has, in turn, seen a notable absence in Western intellectual culture as to the realities of Western imperial power and colonialism.

The consequence of what Quijano (2000; 2024) calls the "coloniality of power" is that it has produced structures of knowledge that have helped to construct and shape not just the organization of the modern (colonial) world-system but which have also been productive of the very subjectivities that have emerged within it. The subordination of colonized populations was in part a matter of "colonizing the minds" of subject populations to naturalize Western colonial rule as being both natural and moral (Dei and Kempf 2016; Gildea 2019). As Quijano (2000) notes, the formal period of colonialism may have ended (with important exceptions such as the Israeli colonization of Palestine) but what he terms "coloniality" persists, embedded both in the subjectivities of the core and periphery and sustained by the activities of a layer of Western intellectuals who have gained influence through their arguments and their relationship to power

(Grosfoguel 2013). These subjectivities have long been resisted by antisystemic movements of either nationalist or radical outlook. As Wallerstein (1997) argued in a point that complements the criticisms of postcolonial scholars, it is the social sciences and the humanities, both disciplines built by a limited number of Western countries (Italy, Germany, the UK, the United States, and France), which have been most important in constructing and revising the dominant geocultural narratives of the modern world-system in an overwhelmingly Eurocentric manner. He added later that “the role of the social sciences was to supply the intellectual underpinnings of the moral justifications that were being used to reinforce the mechanisms of operation of the modern world-system” (Wallerstein 2011: 7).

Perhaps the most important critic of the rationalization of colonialism and imperialism in Western intellectual culture has been Edward Said (1978, 1992, 1993), the founder of postcolonial theory, whose life was spent in a struggle with racist scholarship and in defense of the Palestinian right to exist as a people. Said (1993) noted in his work that Western intellectuals tend to fall into the category of either being functional to power or else aspiring to something closer to Gramsci’s idea of the organic intellectual, taking sides with those subjected to Western colonial power and its aftermath. The former intellectuals have had an important functional role to play in helping to legitimize Western power both domestically and also globally. These are the layer of elite intellectuals who take up roles as advisors to governments, assume membership of major think-tanks such as the Trilateral commission or the Atlantic Council, are given platforms within the mainstream media to voice their opinions in defense of Western power, and act as important members of Western NGOs such as the National Endowment for Democracy, seeking to extend Western power and influence in the internal affairs of states in the periphery and semi-periphery (Gill 1991; Scott-Smith 2003; Scott-Smith and Krabbendam 2003; Collins 2015). As Said (1993) and Grosfoguel (2013) both argue, such intellectuals offer authoritative forms of knowledge which help to construct an understanding of the world and its history, and which rationalizes the West’s colonial history. Consciously or not their outlooks tend to reflect nationalism and Eurocentrism rather than value-free scientific methods (Amin 1989; Blaut 2000).

Underpinning these critiques of Western intellectual culture is the concept of Eurocentrism, an idea which says that historical knowledge produced in the humanities and social sciences valorizes the West, which becomes a measure by which to evaluate and judge non-Western cultures, much to the detriment of the latter (Amin 1989). James Blaut (1989, 2000, 2012) critically examined the Eurocentric nature of Western scholarship which has seriously misrepresented the way in which Europe came to dominate the modern world-system through colonialism and violence rather than through the natural or cultural genius of the European population. As Blaut (1989, 2012) notes, echoing Huntington (1981, 1996), it was the capacity for organized and overwhelming colonial force and violence that enabled Europe to bring the modern world-system into being and then to organize it structurally in a way which saw the European core exploit the non-European periphery for 500 years. The difference between them is that for Huntington this use of violence is rooted in cultural differences between the West and non-Western world which generates eternal cultural wars; whereas for Blaut it is rooted in capitalism as a global system

constructed and dominated by imperialist states. However, I would argue that Blaut's (1989, 2012) argument needs to be supplemented by an analysis which sets out the psycho-sociological processes by which violence becomes normalized as behavior. For example, the consequences of the prolonged use of violence by states was well recognized by Edmund Burke, whose words are particularly apt when considering the West's war on Gaza and the apparent indifference of its governing institutions to the crimes being committed—that persistent use of violence must “strike deepest of all into the manners of the people. They vitiate their politics; they corrupt their morals; they pervert even the natural taste and relish of equity and justice” (Keane 2004: 122). This is even more the case with the relationship between settler colonial movements and colonized populations as evidenced in the West's war against Palestine (Fenelon 2016; Pepperell 2016).

Samir Amin (1989) has alerted us to the complexity of the concept, however, and its attendant dangers of being generalized to the point that there can be no objective grounds for knowledge of world history. If all knowledge is situated in a way which is reduced to an expression of the standpoint of the scholar or their nationalist outlook, then it leads to a form of ontological relativism where there can be no grounds for evaluating one argument against another. All perspectives are inherently different and therefore incommensurable and there can be no better, or worse, account of world history. As Amin (1989) and Blaut (1989) concede, for example, Marx (and Engels) were Eurocentric in several important areas of their work. But it would be a gross error to conclude that Marx's work was therefore irrelevant to a politics of liberation or that all he wrote about the modern world was Eurocentric. To recognize the power of Europe to create and dominate the modern world-system through its colonialism and violence is not necessarily to adopt a Eurocentric position; rather it offers an argument that challenges Eurocentric defenses of colonialism and European power. On this point the insights from Grosfoguel (2002, 2013) on the epistemic challenges to Eurocentrism tell us that the current period is one in which the false universalism of Eurocentric scholarship is being increasingly challenged by the particularisms of the non-Western world. This, in turn, has provoked a geocultural war by the core as a way of trying to reassert its power and authority. The key question that Grosfoguel (2013) brings to our attention is whether there can now be the production of a truly universal knowledge (and an intellectual culture) which avoids the twin pitfalls of Third World or Eurocentric fundamentalism.

### **Colonialism and Mass Education**

“One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating.”

Paulo Freire (2017: 51)

The third generative mechanism through which the West has sought to generate its self-image has been through its school systems and colonial education which, as a generative mechanism, has largely tried to create the effect that Freire (2017) describes, to domesticate its target audience to

accept the naturalness of colonialism (Carretero, Asensio, and Rodríguez-Moneo 2013; Tröhler 2020; Englemann 2023; Neundorf, et al. 2023).

As the modern nation-state developed in the core in the nineteenth century, the ruling classes and governing institutions were increasingly challenged by a deeply exploited working class seeking greater access to the wealth that they had created through their labor, or in many instances who sought a revolutionary transformation of society to socialism. In many parts of the core workers began to organize their own schools, pensions, and health care—through mutual aid societies, friendly societies, cooperative movements, trade unions, and so on (Thane 2016; Ward 2018). This commitment to self-determination and self-organization was a problem for the governing classes of the core, and they saw the threat that libertarian forms of working-class self-organization presented to their ability to control workers, economy, and society (Thane 1984, 2016; Baldwin 1990). Consequently, Germany and the UK in the late nineteenth century saw the introduction of forms of state welfare, a paternalistic relationship that would extend the material and ideological power of the state over workers in return for workers accepting the legitimacy of the existing social and economic order. In the UK, conservative reformers had been attempting to regulate industrial capitalism to reduce social harms since the 1830s (Wallerstein 2011; Thane 2016). As Van Der Linden (2015) notes, nationalism, and chauvinism were implanted into societies of the core through conscious policies of, primarily, education, but also military service, public ceremonies, and memorials.

Nonetheless, this was resisted by some workers who felt that the state was nothing to do with them or their lives. Rather, they saw the state as an alien body that served the interests of the powerful ruling classes and therefore resisted its extension into their everyday lives (Thane 1984). However, states across the core saw the need for an educated, skilled, and controlled workforce that would benefit the growth of manufacturing industries and sought to enforce mandatory education under state control. This meant that in contested and contentious disciplines such as history, education became a forum for nationalist instruction of the working population so that they would formally learn about their country and the West's colonial history more broadly (Arnove 1980; Greenfield 2006; Paglayan 2022). Those historians and teachers that sought to challenge the dominant geocultural views of the West were for a long-time marginal and could be sidelined by educational authorities during the Cold War. This remains a process affecting education today as part of the contemporary geoculture wars as education in the core has become a site of political conflict over curriculum and free critical inquiry. In the United States, for example, state and federal officials alike have acted to ban the teaching of topics deemed to be subversive, such as critical race theory, so vulnerable is their authority to the increasingly powerful criticisms made against it from its own citizens (Lemisch 1975; Giroux 1984, 2022; Carretero 2011; Hirsch and Ross 2014). The state control of education has long given the ruling classes of the core control over what can be taught and the methods by which it would take place, something that libertarian forms of education throughout the twentieth century sought to challenge in favor of a pedagogy of liberation and critical inquiry rather than one of subordination (Smith 1983; Suissa 2006; Freire 2017).

The self-image that the West sought to promote during the colonial period was disseminated to its colonies through education shaped largely by the Christian church (Clayton 1988; Pihama and Lee-Morgan 2019; Englemann 2023). Under these auspices it was not just a matter of instruction of the belief in the natural superiority of the West but also of displacing indigenous cultures and ideas that might challenge this. Cabral (2016: 116) articulated a radical assessment of the legacy of colonialism for African countries when he argued that:

Colonialism inserted a lot of things into our heads. And our task should be to remove what isn't useful and to leave what is good. This is because colonialism doesn't only have things that are useless. Therefore, we should be capable of combating colonial culture and leaving in our heads that aspect of human, scientific culture that the *tugas* brought by chance to our land and also placed in our heads.

The Christian church has historically been fundamental to the expansion of the West as a colonial power, often serving a strong ideological role legitimizing its control over its colonies (Terreblanche 2014; Harrison 2019). Indeed, the anti-Islamic ideology which is powerful in the modern world-system has its roots in the Christian ideology of the crusades as Boucher (2009) has shown. For Grosfoguel (2013) this represented a form of cultural genocide against colonized countries as a defining feature of the modern colonial world-system and what the Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) calls *epistemicide*, the destruction of indigenous forms of knowledge. Indeed, for many countries of the core the Christian church also provided forms of authoritarian education for their own working classes, which served as instruction into accepting the legitimacy of traditional social hierarchies and authority and opposing the radical social and political ideas that were spreading amongst the working class at the time (Smith 1983; Suissa 2006).

The legacy of Christianity in the periphery and semi-periphery is a powerful one with evangelical Christian movements and Catholic forces, often holding deeply reactionary social and political views, still shaping political life in countries across the world-system (Freston 2009). When progressive Christian forces have emerged that have sought to challenge this long-standing mission of instruction and subjugation, in the form of Catholic Liberation theology for example, these have been viewed as a form of Marxist Catholicism to be expunged from the teaching of the Church.

The point about educational instruction here is especially important in terms of understanding the geoculture of the modern world-system. As Clayton (1998, 2004) and other world-system scholars (e.g., Englemann 2023) have argued, the West's continued educational support for the global South through NGOs, charities, and religious institutions serves an important ideological purpose in promoting the hegemony of the West over the world-system. Interestingly, Marxist states over the course of the twentieth century were denounced by many Western intellectuals for using education as a form of political indoctrination—a more serious charge than merely educational instruction (Carretero 2011). The irony here is that the modern world-system itself was based on a process of mass educational instruction through colonialism, religion, and

educational institutions in a systematic and, outside the core, culturally destructive manner (Grosfoguel 2002).

Through these three inter-related generative mechanisms (media/communication, intellectual culture, education/religion), Western states were able to establish a geocultural narrative which presented the West in the best possible light given its actual history of colonialism and interstate wars.

### **The (Geo)Culture Wars—What Happens If They Wake Up...?**

“The architects of power in the United States must create a force that can be felt but not seen.

Power remains strong when it remains in the dark; exposed to the sunlight it begins to evaporate.”

Samuel Huntington, (1981: 75).

Huntington’s point is an important one as it illuminates the significance of geocultural power. The geoculture acts as an ideology which guides governing political, military, and economic elites in their decision-making, but which also serves to promote an image of the core which is self-serving and rationalizes its power and privilege. This latter point is what Huntington (1981) refers to when he talks about power remaining in the dark (hidden). A successful geoculture aims to construct a picture of social life and power which rationalizes the power of the core (the West). The importance of the Western war against Palestine is that it has revealed the increasingly prominent challenges to the West’s authority and its geocultural self-image as the upholder of international law and human rights. In a sense this is not new. As Huntington (1981) suggests, people on the receiving end of Western power have long been exposed to its geopolitical and geoeconomic realities and understood them. What has changed in the twenty-first century is that the digital revolution has led to a qualitative shift in the volume and quality of critical information in the public realm produced by agents critical of the West’s history. These counter narratives have always been there, both in the core itself and across the world-system, but they now possess greater reach, volume and speed than ever before. In the analogue age where the means of communication were technologically limited it was much easier for the West to control dissent. As the debates in the 1970s over a NWICO illustrated, the West had the power to curb radical dissenting voices. The West’s murderous war against Palestine suggests that this is no longer the case. What has changed can be counted threefold: first, writers and critics of the global South are increasingly successful in their challenges to the geocultural narratives of the West. Second, new critical theories have arisen within the core challenging its colonial past and its neocolonial legacy, of which critical race theory has proven to be the most powerful. And third, new media institutions and practices of the periphery and semi-periphery have built global audiences which have been receptive to the critique of the West’s colonial history and imperialist present.



### Antisystemic Movements and the Digital Revolution: Strengths and Weaknesses

What the current Western war on Gaza has shown is that the geoculture constructed by the West (the core) over the *longue durée* has been seriously challenged and that the West's support for and participation in the Israeli war on Gaza has revealed to global public opinion its actual geopolitical and geoeconomic interests rather than its professed ideals (international law, human rights). Fundamental to this challenge to the West's geocultural power has been the impact of the digital revolution on the production of news, the spread of global communication and the transformation of antisystemic cultures (Castells 2013; Bhandari 2023). The digital age has transformed the ways news is gathered and disseminated, the ways in which antisystemic movements organize, and the speed and volume at which people communicate (Chadwick 2007; Henrikson 2024). It has also opened opportunities for antisystemic movements across the world-system to challenge the power of authoritarian states in the periphery and semi-periphery as was seen, for example, with the Arab Spring (Howard and Hussein 2013; Henrikson 2024).

Cyber utopians have long viewed the internet and digitization as a qualitative shift in power away from states and corporations to individuals and groups in civil society (Hayden and El-ojeili 2009). This belief overlaps with the elite-led neoliberal narrative emerging from the core in the 1990s about the internet representing a shift to a "global knowledge economy" that would see knowledge and access to it through the internet becoming the most important form of power in the twenty-first century (Michalski, Miller, and Stevens 2001).

Digitization has created several advantages for antisystemic movements, then, which has led to a qualitative change in human consciousness, communication and culture (Bhandari 2023). As Graeber (2013) and other anarchists have argued this shift in consciousness and culture has also helped transform the ways in which antisystemic movements are organized. These new modes of organizing share much in common with anarchist social theories which argue that social organizations should be based upon *voluntary* and non-hierarchical activity rather than coercion or compulsion (Ward 2011; Bray 2013). What, then, are the strengths and weaknesses of these developments?

#### Strengths

**Global.** Digital networks and communication have facilitated the activities of antisystemic movements globally as has been seen since the emergence of the Zapatistas in 1996. Such dramatic events as the Occupy movement, the Battle of Seattle, the Arab Spring and now the global protests for Palestine have been made possible because of the way antisystemic movements have been able to share information and to organize their activities both locally and globally, 24/7 (Wilkin 2000; Fuchs 2014; Roberts 2014).

**Horizontalism.** Digital networks are often horizontal in organization, meaning in effect that no central group or committee controls it. For antisystemic proponents of horizontalism, this is a principle akin to direct democracy with no central group or committee in charge and issuing orders from above (Sitrin 2006; Bray 2013; Graeber 2013; Bhandari 2023). It is a principle to try to ensure

that hierarchical structure and institutional rigidity do not emerge and that a more egalitarian way of organizing and sharing information is promoted.

**Accessibility.** The take-up of digital technology and access to the internet has been historically unprecedented with 67.9 percent of the global population, unevenly distributed, having access in 2025 (Statista 2025). The development of free and open-source software, for example, gives anyone online access to software that they can use, modify, share, copy, and redistribute to others freely. Social media, primarily dominated by Western digital companies, have also opened platforms enabling people to communicate, distribute information, and organize activities freely and easily. The low costs of mobile phones have further enabled the use of social media by antisystemic movements who can record and disseminate information in real time, often challenging narratives put out by state propaganda, as has been a dramatic feature of the War on Gaza (Cammaerts 2017; Bhandari 2023).

**The Networked Fourth Estate.** Following Yochai Benkler (2013), the final advantage of digitization for antisystemic movements is that it has reinvented the practice of journalism, producing a proliferation of online news sources that give space to critical journalists that would otherwise have struggled to gain access to mainstream media across the world-system. For Benkler, the twenty-first century is producing a (digital) networked fourth estate that potentially can evade the structural problems faced by commercial print and broadcast media, as powerfully depicted in Herman and Chomsky's (1995) Propaganda Model. Online news sources such as *Middle East Eye* and +972, for example, have been influential in creating alternative sources of news about the West's war on Gaza including being able to debunk many of the propaganda claims emanating from the Israeli and Western propaganda institutions. In comparison with the traditional pre-digital print and broadcast media digital media can be established cheaply and quickly and evade many, though clearly not all, of the problems of ownership and control associated with state, public or capitalist media organisations (Bhandari 2023; Oldenbourg 2024).

## Weaknesses

However, the counters to this are many and equally significant, illustrating the kind of chaotic communication network that Brian McNair has described the digital age (McNair, 2006).

**Censorship, Data Gathering, and Social Control.** The first main weakness to the digital revolution and its significance for antisystemic movements is that it has not evaded the control of either the state or the digital corporations as its cyber utopian proponents had hoped it would. Hence the iterations of new platforms and search engines such as Tor have been constructed to enable users to try to evade online surveillance (Poell 2014). What has become apparent, however, is the extent of state surveillance of the internet, social media, and all digital technologies exposed by both Wikileaks and the Snowden leaks (Chawki 2012, Wilkin 2024). The Fives Eyes Network, essentially the creation of the Anglo-Saxon states of the core who dominate it, has been revealed as possessing such far-reaching and illegal powers of surveillance that its software and data gathering networks have been used even to spy on the mobile phone activities of Western leaders such as Angela Merkel (Kerbaj 2022; Williams 2023). These surveillance networks have aided

Israel in its current wars (Kazak 2023; Stroebe and Youssef 2024). What is also clear is that rather than Western digital corporations being the libertarian and anti-statist institutions that they like to present themselves as, they are in fact deeply involved with data sharing with security services across the core and have been heavily funded by Western state agencies (Ahmed 2015). Further, states and corporations across the core have actively sought to censor pro-Palestinian information and messages on social media platforms, leading to the sacking, arrest, or prosecution of academics, journalists, and activists alike (Lewis 2021; Human Rights Watch 2023; Phillips 2023; Mandour, et al. 2024; Osborne 2024; Quinn 2024). The divide between cyber-utopia and cyber-dystopia remains a point of struggle.

**The End of Privacy.** The extension of state and digital corporation data gathering allied with state and corporate digital tools for spying on the activities of citizens has effectively led to the end of privacy. Historically privacy has been viewed by liberal theorists such as Mill as being fundamental to the possibility of freedom (Mill 1998). On this understanding neither the state nor corporations have any automatic right to invade the privacy of citizens or consumers. In the twenty-first century the U.S.-led War on Terror opened up the possibility for the states of the core to extend their monitoring of citizens that connect CCTV video surveillance, facial recognition, mobile phone usage and online activities to potentially monitor, trace, and if necessary, curtail the freedoms of citizens (McCahill 2007). The consequences of this are severe. If privacy is eroded or lost, then the possibility of citizens being able to challenge threats to freedom and democracy is also eroded and the power of the state over societies massively extended.

**Chaotic Information Overload.** McNair's point that the digital age has led to chaotic forms of news culture is an important one (McNair 2006). Whilst it is true that the internet has generated important new sources of critical information that has sought to challenge state and corporate power, it has also produced the opposite with the global rise of far-right movements and networks (Fuchs 2022; Marwick, Clancy, and Furl 2022). A network society need not be intrinsically progressive. In addition, the mass of information available via the internet has also created a form of information overload where citizens have to find ways to separate reliable from unreliable sources (Bawden and Robinson 2009). Just as the internet has opened the possibility for antisystemic movements to disseminate a true account of events in the face of state and corporate propaganda, so too it has also proliferated the voices of deeply authoritarian movements. This problem is compounded by the ways in which states have used the internet and social media as a means by which to disseminate propaganda.

**The Curbing of Free Speech.** As the war on Gaza has illustrated, the digital age has not only ushered in a new era of online information but it has also seen a dramatic increase in state and digital corporate censorship of social media and the internet (Lewis 2023). Across the core states have moved to criminalize online and public support for Palestine using anti-terrorism legislation extended to cover a wide range of antisystemic groups, including environmentalists. Jones has described this as a form of *alethocide*, a war on truth (Fekete 2024; Browne, Weizman, and Matchain 2025; Jones 2025). The second strategy has been to charge groups and individuals, including journalists and academics, with antisemitism for their support for Palestine. As has been

documented by the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé (2024) and others (Winstanley 2023), the weaponizing of antisemitism has been a potent tactic promoted by Israel and its Western supporters to curb dissent over Israel's actions against Palestinians and other countries across West Asia. This criminalization of Free Speech has seen states in the core arrest, deport, and imprison supporters of Palestine, highlighting the selective commitment to free speech shown by states across the core. In the same way, Western digital corporations have censored pro-Palestinian information, blocking sites, de-platforming users, and leading users to seek out other non-Western platforms for information, such as TikTok.

### **The War on Gaza and the Digital Revolution: Western Geocultural Power Challenged**

The war on Gaza has shown itself to be a point at which Western propaganda, including the much-vaunted Israeli Hasbara program, has lost much authority and credibility amongst many citizens around the world, if not with the mainstream Western media itself (Aouragh 2016; Aikerman 2024; Francois 2024; Pappé 2024; Silver 2025). Many of the attacks on the West's geocultural self-image have arisen from young people often derided as being "woke"—by which critics mean to be awake to forms of structural and institutional oppression in society (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020; Stokes 2023). For these new antisystemic movement's racism, sexism, homophobia, trans identities, anti-colonialism, discrimination against the disabled, and so on are all manifestations of the unjust nature of the modern world-system and need to be challenged by antisystemic movements committed to social justice. In short, for these groups the demand for social justice is not necessarily divisive, as some leftist critics have argued, but collective and unifying (Capeheart and Milovanovic 2020). The extent to which this is true in practice remains more problematic, however.

Thus, the digital age has generated the proliferation of alternative forms of media that both bring such groups together and, in many instances, offer alternative critical voices on Western state, corporate, and social power that are not prominent in the mainstream media. This has spread from blogs to major influential voices on social media platforms such as Tiktok, Facebook, and Instagram (Aouragh and Chakravartty 2016). The significance of this cannot be overstated as it represents, in part, an alternative form of education for young people in the West and beyond. Of course, it is important to recognize the counter to this, which is the uncertain nature of many online sources. But this is not a definitive challenge to these new forms of dissent in that the mainstream media across the core has shown itself to be unable to adopt a meaningful critical analysis of its own institutions in the context of the West's war on Gaza (*Al Jazeera* 2024). It would be disingenuous to frame this in terms of professional versus amateur news production, then. The picture is more complicated in the struggle to speak the truth about Gaza. What is clear is that the mainstream media in the core have no privileged ability to speak the truth about the war.

Hence, Hillary Clinton's comments about the West being in an information war are correct, once the meaning of that statement is unpacked. What is under attack is the geocultural self-image that the West has built over the past 500 years, which presents it as the harbinger of progress and freedom to the world and the defender of universal liberal values. The digital age and the West's

war on Gaza has challenged this narrative and opened the possibility for people to gain access to all manner of critical information which reveals the actual history of Western power, including from the perspective of the oppressed populations, and in real time.

### **The Geoculture Wars in the Twenty-First Century**

“‘Today, we celebrate 75 years of vibrant democracy in the heart of the Middle East,’ she said. ‘You have literally made the desert bloom as I could see during my visit to the Negev last year.’”

EU Commission President Ursula van der Leyen celebrates the 75th anniversary of the founding of Israel (MacDonald 2023)

The attack by Hamas on Israeli military forces and colonial settlers on October 7th, 2023, has dramatically intensified the conflicts that were already prevalent in the geoculture wars. The West’s support for and its political and intellectual defenders of Israel have moved swiftly to condemn not only Hamas’ attack but also those who have sought to explain why it happened—in short those who have sought to provide a context which reflects the actual history of Israeli colonialism and apartheid (Pappe 2023). Van Der Leyen’s eulogy for Israel on the 75th anniversary of its founding (MacDonald 2023) is a good example of the way in which Western institutions reflexively reinforce their own power and image and defend their allies. The explicit falsification of the history of Palestine by Van der Leyen is characteristic of the West’s geocultural history, denying agency to those who they colonize and writing a history which justifies colonialism. As Pappe (2007, 2017) notes, the idea that the colonized world is an empty space waiting for Europeans to develop it is a recurring racist colonial trope.

There has been a systematic attempt by the West’s governing institutions to control the narrative of the Palestinian uprising and the Israeli war on Gaza, to present the former as an event with no cause or meaning, simply an act of nihilistic violence against an unprotected population. Such a picture dramatically reverses the historical reality of Israel’s occupation of Palestine. The post-World War II support from the West for Israel (first from France which helped develop its nuclear facilities, and then the United States after the 1967 war) has largely sought to portray Israel as the victim and to conflate being an Israeli citizen with Jewish identity in general (Pappe 2017; Mayer 2021). But this strategy of building and controlling the narrative on Israel has been seriously challenged by the war on Gaza, with Israel now held to account by both the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. This has led both Israeli and Western politicians to question the jurisdiction of the ICC and the universality of international law itself and in some instances to accuse the organizations of being antisemitic (Middle East Eye 2024; RFI 2024). It has led the U.S. government to take actions to punish the leading ICC officials involved in the case and the ICC itself in unprecedented manner, leading to condemnation by human rights groups around the world. This refusal to accept that the United States and its allies are covered by international law was first made clear with the so-called “Hague Invasion Act” passed under President George W. Bush which state that in the case of the ICC holding any U.S. officials,



soldiers, or those if its allies for trial, that the United States retained the right to forcibly rescue them, in violation of international law. There is an added irony here in that many states in the global South have historically charged the ICC and ICJ with pro-Western bias (Tiemessen 2014; Matthews and Farooq 2024). One particularly egregious response from Senator Lindsey Graham, a major Republican Party figure in the United States, suggested that Israel should use nuclear weapons against Gaza, itself a war crime and incitement to mass murder (Liddell 2024).

At the same time the West has continued to arm, advise, support, condone, and defend Israeli war crimes, denying the genocidal nature of the war in favor of the idea that Israel is simply exercising a legitimate right to self-defense (Farge 2024). This is questionable in international law as Israel is an occupying colonial state and therefore has no inherent right to self-defense against those it is subjecting to its occupation. On the contrary, it is the Palestinians that have the legitimate and legal right to self-defense up to an including armed struggle (Wilde 2023). Israel, by contrast, has a duty to protect the population it is colonizing. This has left Western politicians in conflict with international treaties drawn up by their own justices in Geneva in 1949 and Rome in 1998 (Hill-Cawthorne 2024; Singh and Pamuk 2024). It also means that all Western governments supporting Israel are themselves potentially complicit in a genocide and subject to the rulings of the ICC and ICJ. This has led to an unprecedented protest by over 800 U.S. and European officials and diplomats who have condemned their governments support for and complicity in what they view as genocide (Krever 2024).

What the war on Palestine has brought into stark relief for a global audience consuming news from multiple digital sources and directly from Palestinians under attack in Gaza and the West Bank is the very history of oppression and violence that led to the creation of Israel and the denial of Palestinian self-determination. The existence of Israel as a colonial settler state, an extension of European colonial power, is rarely acknowledged or even mentioned in the mainstream Western media. The charge from the global South from figures such as Bishop Desmond Tutu that the Israeli occupation of Palestine is worse in many respects than apartheid South Africa can hardly be voiced (Middle East Eye 2021). Those in the West who do make these points face severe sanctions in many states of the core including the United States, Germany, the UK, and France (Busbridge 2018; Sa'di 2021).

Ironically, many of the leading Western politicians who advocated the creation of the Israeli state were Christian Zionists (e.g., Churchill, Lloyd George, Balfour), supportive of the creation of a "Jewish state," and at the same time also deeply antisemitic themselves (Spector 2008; Mayer 2021). Christian Zionism remains a strong and powerful factor in Western countries today and a part of the *clash* geocultural narrative of a West built upon Judeo-Christian values defending itself from barbarians, as Prime Minister Netanyahu described it (Kiracofe 2009; King 2016). Or as Eyal Zamir, Director General of the Israeli Army told an audience of corporate leaders, army officials, and investors at the Tel Aviv Defense Tech Summit, "This is a war between good and bad.... It is a war between light and darkness, and soon we will light the Hanukkah candles" (Goodfriend 2024).



Christian Zionism has proven to be particularly powerful in the United States amongst the evangelical movements and politicians who share the conviction of their forebears that Israel is the holy land, and that the Second Coming and the end of the world will arrive soon after their return (Clark 2007). The role of white Christian nationalism in U.S. politics is well recognized and under the second Trump administration promises to intensify the war against Palestine and now Iran in a further extension of the Clash thesis (Clark 2007; Whitehead and Perry 2018, 2020). It is another historical irony that while the culture wars often depict a rational West against non-Western states governed by religious fundamentalist movements, that similar kinds of fundamentalism have come to be such a powerful force in the Republican Party in the United States and amongst far right and fascist movements across the core (Whitehead and Perry 2020).

Historically, the West's governing elites have tended to view the state of Israel as a useful ally with which to assert their power in the region (Oren 2011). Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu described Israel as an "aircraft carrier" supporting the cause of Western civilization against barbarians, "We are here on a mighty aircraft carrier of the United States and a few miles from here, there is another mighty aircraft carrier of our common civilization—it's called the State of Israel" (Opall-Rome 2017). As Israeli society has moved to the ultranationalist right politically, eschewing its social democratic tradition, it has extended long-standing policies of settler colonialism which have been there since its foundation, its extermination, occupation, accumulation, and dispossession of Palestinian and Christian populations alike (Pappe 2007; Rosenberg 2022).

The geoculture wars have seen the West defend Israeli actions over the past decade by claiming that criticisms of Israel reflect a double standard against it and that often reflect a veiled antisemitism on the part of the critic (Falk 2017). The West's defense of Israel has been codified in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism which, as critics note, conflates antisemitism with criticism of Israel. Despite strong condemnation from international lawyers, the IHRA definition has proven very useful as a weapon with which to attack critics of Israel in the West and has been adopted by Western institutions from political parties to local government and universities (Gordon 2024). However, the limitation of the strategy has been made clear by the Israeli war on Gaza—it only works if it can be continually extended to all individuals and institutions that challenge the actions of Israel and its Western allies. Thus, even organizations committed to upholding international law are now accused of being antisemitic once they have declared Israel to be potentially guilty of war crimes and genocide (Falk 2017; Looker 2024).

Protesting students and academics, moved by the destruction of Palestinian life that they can witness on social media and independent online news sources, have taken unprecedented action in support of Palestine across many parts of the world-system, including in the United States. These students and scholars are denied moral agency by defenders of Israel and instead are criticized as being naive antisemites who must be expelled from universities along with any sympathetic faculty (Giroux 2025). Labelling criticism of Israel as antisemitic and denying its critics moral agency, the idea that they might be acting to uphold the very universal liberal values that the West claims

to stand for, has exposed the contradictory nature of Western geopolitical and geoeconomic power. The geoculture wars have shifted the narrative about Western power and civilization out of the control of its dominant geocultural institutions and led to a global form of antisystemic resistance informed largely through social media and online independent news sources. Thus, the development of new online news platforms such as +972, which is run by young Israeli and Palestinian journalists opposed to the occupation and war on Gaza, and which have broken important stories about Israel's war crimes and its Hasbara propaganda program. These crimes have been exposed by various sources including Al Jazeera, Middle East Monitor and Human Rights organisations within Israel such as B'Tselem (B'Tselem, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2023; Sanders and Al Jazeera, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Goldberg and Confine, 2024; Cook, 2024).

### **Conclusion: The Geoculture Wars and Manufacturing Consent**

"I need to be careful about saying this, because people will really get upset — there's really no such thing as a Palestinian."

Mike Huckabee, U.S. Ambassador to Israel (Kaczynski 2015)

The war on Gaza is situated in the context of the ongoing geoculture wars and it represents a radical transition in understanding of that conflict as it has exposed to a global audience and in real time the actions of the West to be in opposition to its espoused commitment to universal liberal values, human rights and international law. As Western states increasingly succumb to ultra nationalist far-right, religious, and fascistic governments who see the Clash of Civilizations as a thesis that accurately describes the world around them, so too do their moral contradictions become more apparent. Israeli political leaders seeking to dehumanize Palestinians by referring to them as animals, for example, is a discursive strategy that can be found in different forms across the mainstream of Western political culture, as Ruth Wodak has noted (Wodak 2015; Middle East Eye 2023). So normal has anti-Islamic racism become in Western political discourse and commentary that the UK's leading tabloid newspaper, for example, can openly promote it through its columnists when analyzing the plight of refugees fleeing war-torn Libya and Syria and trying to find safety in the UK: "Rescue Boats? I'd send gunships to stop illegal immigrants. Make no mistake, these migrants are like cockroaches" (Justice 2015).

The declaration by President Trump on February 5th, 2025, that Gaza needed to be cleansed was in effect an open declaration of war by the United States on Palestine. The fact that the declaration was made by President Trump alongside President Netanyahu of Israel, the latter facing arrest warrants from the ICC for war crimes, could not have made the West's rejection of international law and human rights any clearer. The manufactured invisibility of the Palestinians in the rhetoric of Western liberal and nationalist political elites was made clear by the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Holocaust memorial speech in 2025. Starmer, a socialist and self-declared Zionist, had already defended Israel's actions as legitimate self-defense. In his Holocaust memorial speech, he solemnly declared that "Because we say never again, but where was never again in

Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, or the acts of genocide against Yazidi. Today, we have to make those words mean more” (Starmer 2025). Palestine was absent from his list.

**About the Author:** Peter Wilkin is a Reader in social science at Brunel University and has written on a range of issues including the political economy of communication, design, social movements, the politics of satire, and issues of security and development. He is currently working on two books: the first is on student debt crisis, the second examines the West’s ongoing war on the Third World.

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