

OPINIONS

An Evening with Norman Finkelstein and The Unseen Genocide of Gaza

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WORLD INTO WORDS

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An injured child is seen at Al-Ahli Arab Hospital after an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City, on Dec 19, 2024. (Photo by Abdul Rahman Salama/Xinhua)

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AN evening with Professor Norman Finkelstein is not one you leave unchanged. His recent lecture in Manchester, “What happened? Where do

things stand? What's next?", wasn't just an academic exercise, it was a moral confrontation.

At 70, Finkelstein's clarity, passion, and refusal to compromise forced his audience to reckon with truths that many prefer to ignore. His piercing analysis of Gaza's destruction and the world's complicity wasn't designed to inspire hope but to demand accountability.

Finkelstein's central assertion was stark: "Gaza is no more." Not a hyperbolic lament, but an undeniable reality backed by devastating facts.

Two months ago, the United Nations reported that the genocide in Gaza had left behind 40 million tonnes of rubble, enough to bury New York's Central Park under eight metres of destruction. Clearing this wreckage, they estimate, will take 15 years and USD\$650 million.

But what lies beneath the rubble is far more than a shattered city. It is a severed connection to a land, a history, and a future that now exists only in memories and dreams.

For Finkelstein, Gaza isn't a victim of unfortunate events but the target of a calculated strategy to destroy a people's spirit and identity. He described the devastation not as collateral damage but as the deliberate result of decades of occupation, siege, and military aggression.

Imagine, he said, your childhood home reduced to dust, your school obliterated, your community scattered beyond recognition. For Gaza's two million residents, this isn't an exceptional tragedy, it is their lived reality, one that has persisted for decades.

The destruction is not random. It is part of a deliberate effort to dismantle the possibility of life with dignity in Gaza. Homes, hospitals, schools, and water systems have been systematically destroyed, leaving the population trapped in a cycle of survival.

In 2012, the United Nations warned that Gaza would become “unlivable” by 2020. That warning, like so many others, went unheeded.

Today, Gaza’s collapse is almost complete, and while the world pays attention, it remains paralysed by inaction and constrained by a refusal to confront the structural forces enabling this devastation.

Finkelstein traced the roots of this destruction to Israel’s military operations in Gaza, each more devastating than the last. From Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012 to Protective Edge in 2014, these campaigns have followed a clear pattern: overwhelming force inflicted on a population with nowhere to escape.

But none was as catastrophic as Operation Cast Lead in 2008–2009. For 22 days, Israeli forces unleashed airstrikes, artillery barrages, and ground invasions, killing over 1,400 Palestinians, including more than 900 civilians.

The Goldstone Report by the United Nations documented entire neighbourhoods flattened and critical infrastructure destroyed. Schools, hospitals, and homes were not spared. One hundred thousand people were left homeless, and Gaza’s recovery was crippled before it could even begin.

Finkelstein argued that Cast Lead wasn’t an anomaly- it was a test case, a blueprint for future campaigns that would deepen Gaza’s suffering. Each operation has served as a reminder to the world that no amount of civilian death or destruction will provoke meaningful intervention.

But Finkelstein didn’t stop at documenting the physical destruction. He urged us to confront the deeper human cost of Gaza’s obliteration.

What does it mean to raise children who know only war? To live without stability, without safety, without hope? In Gaza, bombings are not interruptions - they are a constant.

Children grow up amid violence, their futures stolen before they even begin. Studies reveal staggering rates of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) among Gaza's youth. These children are not just traumatised; they are being systematically denied the chance to heal.

Finkelstein reminded us that every statistic is a life disrupted. A parent burying a child. A student whose dreams of university have turned to rubble. A family rebuilding a home for the third, fourth, or fifth time, knowing it may be destroyed again.

These stories, he said, aren't side effects of military strategy - they are its goals. Gaza's destruction is not just a physical assault; it is an attack on the very essence of a people's identity and their right to exist.

Finkelstein's critique didn't spare the international community. He argued that Gaza's suffering is not just the result of Israeli aggression but of global complicity.

International aid, while necessary for survival, often obscures the root causes of the crisis. Politicians express "deep concern" while continuing to fund and arm the perpetrators. Media narratives frame Gaza's destruction as a "conflict" between equals rather than a massacre by a vastly superior force. These distortions, Finkelstein said, are not accidental. They are deliberate attempts to shift blame and deflect accountability.

"To do nothing," he reminded, "is not neutrality - it is complicity."

The images of Gaza's destruction- the rubble, the grieving families, the hollow-eyed children- are not hidden. They appear on our screens, in our headlines, yet too often are met with indifference. This apathy, Finkelstein warned, is what allows oppression to thrive.

During the Q&A session, someone asked the inevitable question: "What can we do if nothing can truly change?" Finkelstein's response drew on the wisdom of his mentor, Noam Chomsky, who often cited Confucius during the

later years of his life: “To know you will fail and still persist is the mark of moral strength.”

His answer wasn't comforting, but it was powerful. Even if the odds seem insurmountable, he argued, we have a moral obligation to act. To resist, even in the face of likely failure, is to affirm our humanity.

Resistance, Finkelstein prompted us, is rarely immediate or easy. It is slow, lonely, and often thankless. But it is necessary.

Silence, he said, always sides with the oppressor. The fight for justice is not about winning overnight - it is about refusing to accept a world where suffering is normalised and oppression goes unchallenged.

As I left the lecture, I was struck by the urgency of Finkelstein's message. Gaza's genocide is not hidden - it is unfolding in plain sight. Yet the world continues to turn away.

Finkelstein didn't offer hope, but he offered clarity. Change may not come quickly or even in our lifetimes, but to act is to resist complicity. To remain silent is to choose the side of injustice.

Gaza may lie in ruins, but its people endure. Their resilience is a testament to the strength of the human spirit, even in the face of unimaginable hardship. The question Finkelstein leaves us with is not just what we can do - but whether we can live with ourselves if we fail to try.

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