

PROBLEMS OF EUROCENTRIC VIEWS OF HISTORY:
AN EXAMINATION OF CERTAIN ELEMENTARY VIEWS
ABOUT COLONIALISM IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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Abstract

The 2011 Arab uprisings have taken observers by surprise. Many expressed similar bewilderment over three decades ago when a revolutionary wave had shaken Iran. Why are the “pundits” of international politics so confused about the Muslim world? A student of history must ask why “experts” trained in social sciences and humanities have failed to envisage these events. In our opinion this has happened because of the Eurocentric view of history, particularly due to the misreading of the history of colonialism in the Muslim world. This paper examines the European historiography on the subject and explains the root cause of the problem. It concentrates on two issues: the question of economic exploitation and dependence of the Muslim world on colonial powers and the question of Muslim commitment to identity and loyalty in the modern world. On the first question we would argue that Muslim world was made subservient to Europe by coercion and on the second, we would demonstrate that unlike Europe, Muslims never abandoned their ummah identity consciousness during and after their struggles for nationhood.

Introduction

The 2011 Arab uprisings surprised many observers who expressed similar bewilderment over three decades ago when a revolutionary wave had shaken Iran. It appears that international political “pundits” are easily confused about the Muslim world. We undertake to examine this question in this essay. In our view this problem originated because of a prejudiced presentation and manipulation of some facts in history which may be categorized as

a sort of Eurocentric view of history. In our view the current predicament started off during the colonial period of Muslim history.

This paper concentrates on two questions: the issue of economic exploitation by colonial powers which resulted in an imposition of a relationship of dependence on many former colonies in Africa and Asia on Europe, and the question of Muslim commitment to identity and loyalty in the modern world. On the first question, we would argue that the Muslim world was wealthy, an evidence of which one would find for instance, in the artistically magnificent *Taj Mahal* of India and similar other achievements in various parts of the world. We hold the view that Europe made the Muslim world subservient by coercion. On the second question, we would demonstrate that Muslims never abandoned their *ummah* identity consciousness during their struggle for nationalism. In fact, most nationalist leaders were motivated by Islamic ideas during their struggle for independence, and their demands for Islamic idealistic goals resurfaced in Muslim nations in contemporary history.

Economic Exploitation of the Muslim World under Colonialism

We begin our examination with the question of economic exploitation of the Muslim world under colonialism. European colonialism came as a major challenge to the Muslim world. Writing on the impact of colonialism in Africa and Asia, Hans Kohn, a historian of colonialism and nationalism claimed, “. . . thanks to colonialism, for the first time capable native cadres for the administration of the country and for all walks of civilized life have come into existence”.¹ According to Kohn:

Poverty has existed in Asia and Africa since time immemorial, as it existed in Europe until the rise of liberalism and capitalism, though in Asia and Africa it

¹ Hans Kohn, “Reflections on Colonialism”, *The Idea of Colonialism*. Ed. Robert Strausz-Hupe and Harry W. Hazard (London: Atlantic Books, 1958), 2-16: 6.

has, for reasons and geography, been more acute and more ubiquitous than in Europe. As far as historical memory goes, there has been perpetual warfare in Asia and Africa; ... Western imperialism ... has brought lasting benefits to both continents...²

We shall now examine general developments in the Muslim world in the of Kohn's claims. We shall revise the general economic, educational, legal, and political impact of colonialism on Muslim society.

Kohn does not support his observation with any statistical records. We propose to survey developments in some early colonies in Asia and Africa while examining Kohn's statement. Our emphasis will fall into the general socio-political and economic conditions in the Muslim world. Since the scope for such discussions would be very wide, we shall confine our discussion mainly to India where the British established one of its first colonies (in Bengal) in 1765. We shall also discuss the situation in Algeria where France established one of its early colonies (mainly Algiers and the adjacent areas) in 1830. In our opinion, these two cases of European colonial rule in Muslim countries reflect the general pattern of European colonial rule in the Muslim world.

Beginning of European Penetration into the Muslim World

European penetration into the Muslim world began following the expulsion of the Muslims from Spain (1492) and with the Portuguese capture of Goa (1510) on the Indian coast and Malacca (1511) in the Malay Peninsula along with aggressive Portuguese activities in the North and East African coasts.³ The Portuguese believed that in order to gain commercial supremacy over the Indian Ocean it was necessary to occupy and control certain strategic points in the region. They were reported to have been

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ For a good description on the nature of colonial penetration into Asia, see K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*. (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 1993).

making over 500% profits by importing goods from Asian markets. This attracted other European countries to the region. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the European trading companies became more organized: the Dutch, the French and the British formed East India Companies as joint stock enterprises along with many other similar ventures. These companies were all supported by their governments who competed against each other for commercial privileges from local rulers in Asia and Africa. Occasionally, Eastern rulers took advantage of the presence of these enterprises close to their territories. The Persian Safavids invited the British to fight against the Portuguese: at the time, the Portuguese had already established colonies in Hormuz, Bahrain and Muscat in the Persian Gulf coast. In the case of the Sultan of Johor, he began to cooperate with the Dutch against the Portuguese settlement of Malacca.⁴ As a result, the territory changed hands, the Netherlands capturing it in 1641. In the process, European countries began to acquaint themselves with the internal politics of Muslim countries and occasionally secured and increased the amount of trade concessions from Muslim rulers.

Powerful Muslim rulers did not seem to have been concerned about the interference of European countries in the affairs of some Muslim populated areas. In the 1680s, however, when the British East India Company (EIC) attempted to capture Bombay (now called Mumbai), a major trading centre on the coast of India, the powerful Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1657–1707) cancelled all concessions granted to the British. This had devastating effect on the British interest in the region. Therefore, in reference to the Company's relationship with Mughal rulers a historian says:

. . . [t]he company was forced to go on bended knee to Aurangzeb and ask his indulgence with respect to continuing Company trade with India. Fortunately, as far as the Company's future was concerned,

⁴ Rupert Emerson, *Malaysia: A Study in Direct and Indirect Rule*. (Kuala Lumpur: University Press, 1979), 67.

Aurangzeb took view that the English were nothing more than an irritant in the greater imperial scheme of things, . . . the company had to issue abject apologies . . . unfortunate incidents were forgotten and trade relations returned to normal.⁵

There were many reasons for the EIC to apologize to the Indian Emperor: the Indian trade had already become the backbone for the British Economy. In fact, all European countries were making huge profits by selling eastern goods in European markets. In the seventeenth century the British East India Company was making at least 200% profit and substantial loans to the British government.

The relationship of trade between Europe and Afro-Asian countries was different from today's understanding of trade between the two regions. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, trade was based on the Europeans buying eastern goods in exchange for bullion (gold and silver bars) which they had acquired from the Americas. There was hardly any demand for European goods in Asia and Africa. The Europeans generally imported sugar, pepper and other spices, saltpeter (an ingredient of gunpowder), silk and other manufactured fabrics and goods.

In the process of conducting trade, the Europeans not only established factories in various parts of the Muslim world,⁶ they also acquired permission from Muslim rulers to maintain armed forces to protect their business interests. Slowly, these companies began to take part in conflicts during political successions in various places in the region. Occasionally they would offer military assistance to one or the other contenders to the throne, and on successful completion of the job, they would secure increased trade concessions from the new rulers. Increasing demands by the Europeans gradually led to the establishment of direct colonial rule

⁵ Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993). 50.

⁶ Factories were local government's approved stations of European countries to facilitate their trading activities.

over several Muslim countries. Organized efforts to combine scattered establishments from a central point began perhaps with the Dutch efforts under Van Imhoff (1705-1750) between 1743 and 1750, but the British East India Company was most successful in this colonizing effort which began in 1757 with the occupation of Bengal in Eastern India.

Early Period of Colonization

Bengal was one of the richer areas of the world in the seventeenth century.⁷ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the British EIC conducted 60% of its trade with Bengal. At the time, although Bengal was a part of the Delhi centered Mughal Empire, it practically had separated itself from Delhi. In 1756 the new *Nawab* (ruler), Siraj ad-Dawlah (1729-1757), cancelled all trade concessions granted to the EIC because of the misconduct of some Company officials. The young *Nawab* had many rivals within the royal household. Company officials began to conspire with Siraj ad-Dawlah's rivals and eventually succeeded in inducing the Commander-in-Chief of the *Nawab's* army. In 1757 in the battle of Polashi (Plassy) the *Nawab* was defeated and killed and Mir Ja'far Ali Khan (d. 1765), the Commander-in-Chief, was declared the new *Nawab*. The EIC demanded and received a huge amount of wealth from Mir Ja'far. Even the British sources do not hide this fact. According to one British source:

Before Plassy, it was privately agreed that in addition to the official compensation, £400,000 should be given to the army and navy and £150,000 to the select committee of six [the Board of Directors]. The

⁷ Here one must dispute Kohn's claim that poverty existed in Asia as it existed in Europe. In fact, studies dealing with the economic situation obtained during this period suggest that Bengal was much wealthier than England and that is why it attracted European merchants in the area. See Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Economic History of India: 1600-1800*. London: Longmans, nd.

members of council received £50,000 to £80,000 each.⁸

Muslim sources put the figure much higher. Based on contemporary Muslim documents, one historian puts the figure as:

... [r]upees 22,900,000 [about £5,000,000] under various heads. This amount was in addition to secret and private promises for huge rewards to Clive [commander of the Company forces] and his associates which stipulated the payment of at least £550,000.⁹

The EIC was in desperate need for money to fund other colonial wars and continued to exert pressure on the Bengal government to generate money. The same British source says, "... the discovery that the *Nawab's* treasury contained only 1½ millions sterling instead of the 40 millions which were rumored led to no abatement in the demands."¹⁰ In fact, there could be no proper record for the total transfer of wealth from Bengal to England during this period because of the lack of order and strong government immediately after British occupation. When the treasury ran out of gold and silver coins, the colonialists collected jewels, precious stones and every item of luxury goods that were available among the royals and the aristocracy. As early as May 24, 1769 one EIC official is reported to have written, "It must give pain to an Englishman to have reason to think that since the accession of the Company to the *Dewani* the condition of the people of this country has been worse than it was before. ... This fine country, which flourished under the most despotic and

⁸ Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of India*. 4th ed. (Delhi, London: Oxford University Press, 1958) 473.

⁹ See Muhammad M. Ali, *History of the Muslims in Bengal*. 2 vols. (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, 1988), 2A: 11.

¹⁰ Spear, 473.

arbitrary government, is verging towards ruin.”¹¹ According to *The Oxford History of India*, “men made fortunes, returned to England, lost them and returned to India for more.”¹² This process continued for a long time. This new found wealth created havoc in British society. On the impact of Bengal wealth on 18th century British society, *The Oxford History of India* further records:

This sudden affluence of the Company’s Bengal servants had a variety of results. It started a stream of returned ‘Indians’ to England who became the ‘Nabobs’ [*Nawabs*] of eighteenth-century England, scandalizing society by their ostentation and creating jealousy by their wealth. Their influence began to be felt by 1760 and they were a parliamentary force by 1767.¹³

This parliamentary force played an important role in institutionalizing colonialism and establishing the British Empire that was originally initiated by some trading companies. The Bengal government’s failure to generate funds for EIC led Company officials to assume direct control over the government. In 1765, EIC officially secured the Mughal emperor’s permission to collect tax in Bengal. The EIC administration was consolidated in 1772 with the appointment of Warren Hastings (1732-1818) as the Governor General of India. Hastings adopted cruel and severe methods for collecting money from the people of Bengal. As a result, Hastings was impeached and while arguing against him in the hearing, Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an Irish conservative member in the British parliament, highlighted the suffering of the Indians under Company rule. Reporting the cruel methods in which the British collected tax from the local population, he said:

¹¹ Quoted in Panikkar, 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, 474.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 519

Those who could not raise the money were most cruelly tortured: cords were drawn tightly round their fingers, till the flesh of the four on each hand was actually incorporated, and became solid mass: the fingers were then separated again by wedges of iron and wood driven in between them. – Others were tied two and two by feet uppermost; they were then beat on the soles of the feet, till their toe-nails dropped off. They were afterwards beat about the head till blood gushed out at the mouth, nose, and ears; they were also flogged upon the naked body with... some poisonous weeds, which burnt at every touch... a father and son tied naked to each other by the feet and arms, and then flogged till the skin was torn from the flesh;...

The treatment of the females could not be described: - dragged from the inmost recesses of their houses, which the religion of the country had made so many sanctuaries, they were exposed naked to public view: the virgins were carried to the Court of Justice, where they might naturally have looked for protection; but now they looked for it in vain; for in the face of the minister of justice, in the face of the spectators, in the face of the sun, those tender and modest virgins were brutally violated. The only difference between their treatment and that of their mothers was, that the former were dishonored in the face of the day, the latter in the gloomy recesses of their dungeon. Other females had the nipples of their breasts put in a cleft bamboo, and torn off... the fathers and husbands of the helpless females were the most harmless and industrious set of men... they gave almost the whole produce of their labor to the East India Company:... produced to all England the comforts of their morning and evening tea: for it was with the rent produced by their industry, that the

investments were made for the trade to China, where the tea which we use was brought.¹⁴

Yet, Warren Hastings, under whose command this brutality was carried out, was acquitted in the view of the “valuable services” he had rendered to the country in establishing the colonial administration. This “valuable service” continued to be rendered by officials till 1857, when following a major revolt against the Company rule, the whole of India was transferred to the British crown.

Initially, the French refrained from establishing direct colonies in Muslim countries because of the capitulation Treaty signed between Francis I (1515-1547) and the Ottoman Sultan Sulaiman (1494-1566) the Magnificent in 1536. Under the treaty the French enjoyed the status of separate *millet* within the Osmanli administrative system and secured the right to conduct trade in Osmanli territories. With the changing situation and increased weakness of the Ottomans however, the French also became active in direct colonization efforts in Asia and Africa. In due time, the French turned out to be the primary rivals of the British. The British success in Bengal and the huge wealth that they had acquired in the newly founded colony created envy among the French. Following the French Revolution, the Directory Government (1795-1799) entrusted General Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) with the responsibility to attack Britain. Napoleon decided to attack Egypt instead because he believed that by capturing Egypt he would be able to block routes to India and thus eliminate the newly acquired economic power of Great Britain. Although France failed in achieving its goal, it increased interest in its direct colonization process. It also needed to settle its dispute between the nobility and common people who were affected by the Revolution, particularly during the Jacobin period (1792-1793). Years later in 1830 the French Monarchists decided to invade Algeria.

¹⁴ James Mill, *The History of British India*. 3 vols. (London: 1817., New Delhi: Associated Press, 1990), 3 66-67.

During the early years of the revolution the French army bought grains from Algeria through two Jewish Algerian Merchants. Arrears of the payment of this grain amounted to about 8 million francs. On their part the Jewish merchants were indebted to the *dey* or the Ottoman governor of Algiers in 1798. In 1818, when Hussain Dey came to power, he wanted to recover this amount. The *dey*'s efforts continued for several years and tensions increased over time. In 1827, the *dey* was accused of slapping the French consul in Algiers and the French government began to threaten the Algiers government through various unsuccessful means, including a naval blockade and the fortification of the existing French factories in the region. Meanwhile, the French government found another reason to attack Algiers: the general elections in France were scheduled to be held in July 1830 and King Charles X wanted to gain support by providing a potential place for settlements to displaced farmers of the revolutionary era.¹⁵ The French Minister of War General Bourmont himself, led the attack against Algeria. According to one historian:

It is estimated that one hundred million francs reached France from Algiers in 1830, obtained from the *dey*'s captured treasures and looting of private property. Only about half of this sum reached the [French] treasury ... The rest was pocketed by officers and other personnel who took part in the invasion.¹⁶

The French Government officially explained to other European countries, however, that an invasion of Algeria was necessary in order to counter piracy and contain slavery. In reality, France enslaved the total population of Algeria and made it a dumping ground for French refugees. Again, in 1871, many

¹⁵ In 1824 after the death of Louis XVIII, when Charles X came to power, he returned the properties to the émigrés which were earlier distributed among the common farmers by the Jacobins in 1793.

¹⁶ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 251.

refugees from Alsace and Lorraine were accommodated in Algeria. These European settlers became the middlemen between the colonizers and the colonized in Algeria. By 1953, just before the armed struggle for independence by Algerians began, there were almost one million French and other European settlers in Algeria out of a total population of about 9 million.

Slowly, the French colony began to expand beyond Algiers. The people of Algeria faced a similar situation as was faced by the people of Bengal at the hands of the British. One French eyewitness account describes the occupation of Tlemcen (a city in Algeria):

In 1833 Tlemcen was occupied and its population subjected to force exile and the arbitrary imposition of war tributes exacted from them by General Clauzel (successor of General Bourmont), who was impressed with the city's prosperity. Those who could not pay in cash were forced to bring their wives' jewelry... The indigenous population is in a terrifying state of misery and deprivation... by expelling the traders, by taking all sorts of violent measures, we have spread misery everywhere.¹⁷

Similarly, a Dutch historian describes the occupation of Indonesia as "destruction, resistance and reprisals were the monotonous story of the Moluccas".¹⁸

This behavior of European colonizers raises questions about European values which during this period were inspiring them for what has come to be known as the Enlightenment. Historian Panikkar explains a response citing the case of the Netherlands, "though the Government of Holland continued to profess revolutionary principles they added the rider that 'the doctrines of

¹⁷ Quoted in Mahfoud Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria, 1830-1987: Colonial Upheavals and Post independence Development*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 38.

¹⁸ Quoted in K.M. Panikkar, 86.

liberty and equality ... cannot be transferred to nor applied to the East Indian possessions of the State so long as the security of the possessions depends on the existing and necessary state of subordination.”¹⁹ Another historian, M. Ricklefs, noted that, “Although the VOC (the Dutch East India Company) as an organization was Dutch, many of its personnel were not. Adventurers, vagabonds, criminals and the unfortunate from throughout Europe took its oath of allegiance. Inefficiency, dishonesty, nepotism, and alcoholism were widespread in the VOC.”²⁰ However, the historian justifies the behavior as saying, “There was much brutality which modern minds find repellent, but it must be remembered that this was a brutal age, and Indonesians showed no greater gentleness.”²¹

By the end of the nineteenth century, most parts of the Muslim world came under European rule. By then, Britain, the Netherlands and France were joined by Germany and Italy in competition for colonies in Africa and Asia. Among European countries, only Russia extended its rule by land; all others came to be maritime powers and occupied territories far away from the mainland. The competition for colonies and the rise of nationalism and Social Darwinism in 19th century Europe intensified so much that it eventually resulted in the two world wars of the 20th century.

Unrelenting Economic Exploitation under Colonization

The early impact of colonialism on the Afro-Asian economy was devastating. The colonialists not only resorted to what might be called the looting of available wealth, but by the end of their rule, the Asian and African countries were made completely dependent on European economies. As opposed to the claim by Hans Kohn (quoted earlier), the colonial economies were deliberately designed for the benefit of the “mother countries” in Europe and the detriment of the colonies. It must be pointed out here that no Afro-

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1200*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 31.

²¹ Ibid.

Asian country was under foreign debt before the colonial era. Romesh Dutt, a civil servant of the British Indian government, says:

... [t]he sources of national wealth in India have been narrowed under British rule. India in the eighteenth century was a great manufacturing as well as a great agricultural country, and the products of the Indian loom supplied the markets of Asia and of Europe.... The East India Company and the British Parliament,... discouraged Indian manufacturers in the early years of British rule in order to encourage rising manufacturers of England.²²

Romesh Dutt further observes:

Endeavors were made, which were fatally successful, to repress Indian manufacturers and to extend British manufactures. The import of Indian goods to Europe was repressed by prohibitive duties; the export of British goods to India was encouraged by almost nominal duties. The production of raw material in India for British industries and the consumption of British manufacturers in India were the twofold objects of the early commercial policy of England. The British manufacturer, in the words of the historian Horace Hayman Wilson, “employed the arm of the political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not have contended on equal terms”²³.

Clearly, there is a direct relationship between the Industrial Revolution in England and the destruction of cotton industries in

²² Romesh Dutt, *The economic History of India*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge.1901), 1; ix-x.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2:vi.

Afro-Asian countries, particularly in Bengal. According to Bennoune, "... the year 1783 saw the introduction of the first sample of English muslin (a variety of fine cotton fabrics) into Bengal, and 1786 the complete cessation of the export of yarn from this province to England. By 1800 the national industry of India which gave employment to millions... was on the road to ruin"²⁴. The EIC banned the production of muslin in Bengal. This ban was implemented by chopping off the fingers of highly sophisticated artisans so that they not only failed to produce muslin, but also failed to teach the mechanism of its production to the younger generation. "Thus", observes a historian of Indian economy, "while the export of such Indian raw materials as cotton, silk, hides, oil-seeds, dye-stuffs, and jute that were essential for the progress of the Industrial Revolution was encouraged by England since the beginning of the nineteenth century, India entered a period of de-industrialization and increased dependence of agriculture"²⁵. Similarly in Algeria "all the utensils for domestic use that were manufactured by the potters, tinkers, smelters, coppersmiths and tinsmiths had been replaced by European hardware". As a result, the number of Algerian artisans declined from 100,000 in the mid nineteenth century, to 3,500 in 1951.²⁶

In order to accumulate wealth very quickly, the East India Company in Bengal imposed a heavy agricultural tax. The land tax first imposed by the East India Company was one-half of the gross produce of the land. During the last year of the pre-colonial era, land revenue of £817,553 was realized, but within thirty years this amount was increased to £2,680,000. Huge amounts of money used to be remitted out of Bengal annually. According to Romesh Dutt:

... [n]early one-third of the net revenues of Bengal was annually remitted out of the country. But the actual drain from the country was much larger. A

²⁴ Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The economic History of India: 1699-1800* (London: Longmans, n.d.), 182.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

²⁶ Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria*, 67.

large portion of the civil and military expenses consisted in the pay of European officials who sent all their savings out of India. And the vast fortunes reared by those who had excluded the country merchants from their legitimate trades and industries were annually sent out of India. The actual drain from Bengal is perhaps more correctly represented in the figures for imports and exports for the years 1766, 1767, and 1768, compiled by Governor Harry Vereist. [The figure is: imports £624,375 and exports £6,311,250.]²⁷

During the early period of the colonial rule the urban centers became impoverished and depopulated. The population of the city of Oran, Algeria, in 1830 for example, was about 10,000 which declined to mere 1,000 in 1832. In many places, Islam became a rural phenomenon. Soon, the colonial authorities recognized the value of the indigenous work force because the “price paid to the indigenous worker will not ordinarily exceed a quarter of that which we are obliged to give the French worker”. As early as 1851 the French Minister of War argued:

To attract the Arab laborer to work for the French owners... is the best and most proper thing to do so that French domination will be asserted definitely... we find in the Arab worker several essential qualities. He is sober and does not have too many needs; no matter how hard the tasks he is given to perform, he is less disconnected than then European worker. He is robust and acclimated and this permits us to count on him for all seasons. He is intelligent and docile.²⁸

²⁷ Romesh Dutt, *Economic History of India*, 1: 46-47.

²⁸ Bennoune, *The Making of Contemporary Algeria*, 56. It should be noted that at the end of the 19th century many Europeans were motivated by Social Darwinism and believed that the races of Asia and Africa were inferior to the Europeans and that they would eventually be ruined in the face of European

This pattern of utilizing a labor force became institutionalized at a later stage of colonial history. In this process of economic exploitation, increasingly new colonies were added; Egypt becoming one such colony at the end of the 19th century and remaining of the “sovereign” Ottoman state.

The idea of a canal linking the Mediterranean and the Red Sea goes back to the time of the Pharaohs. Ottoman Sultan Selim III (1761-1808) once planned to dig the canal, but in view of military weaknesses of the Ottoman and European rivalry for colonization, the idea was abandoned. Due to the Napoleonic Invasion in the late eighteenth century, the French influence increased in Egypt, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, a French engineer designed a canal linking the two seas. The British were opposed to this idea and in order to reduce the importance of the canal, they immediately constructed a railway line connecting the two ports on the coasts. The French continued with their efforts, however, and secured the support of the Ottoman governor of Egypt in 1856. Attempts were made to raise funds from among European investors, but the British government took all possible steps to foil these attempts. At last, the Egyptian government decided to borrow from European banks to complete the project. By the time the Suez Canal was opened for navigation in 1869, the Egyptian government was already heavily in debt. The government invited the French empress to the opening ceremony of the canal and spent extravagantly for the occasion. Meanwhile, the canal was mostly being used by British ships. The British government found a good opportunity to pressure the Egyptian government through creditors. Within five years, the British forced the Egyptian government to sell their share (44%) for only £4,000,000 but the

challenges. This belief originated during the European colonial experience in the Americas and in Australasia where the original populations were wiped out. Later this belief was strengthened due to early resistance where many from the indigenous people died. Both Bengal and Algeria witnessed severe famines: in these famines almost one third of their population perished. However when the colonialists noticed the increase in population among the natives, initially they were surprised. However, they reconciled with the phenomenon observing that the local population could be proved to be assets to the colonial designs.

debt had already risen to over £100,000,000.²⁹ In order to “help” Egypt pay back the foreign debt, the British pressured the Egyptian government to appoint a British advisor with a ministerial rank who would advise on how the country could repay the debt. The British advisor imposed heavy taxes on the Egyptian cotton producers instead of increasing tolls for the users of the Suez Canal. There was an immediate reaction – the Egyptian forces, under the leadership of Ahmad ‘Urabi Pasha, son of an Egyptian peasant, revolted against the government in 1881. This provided the British a pretext to invade Egypt directly. The British forces launched an attack from their ships in the Mediterranean and the indiscriminate onslaught of civilians forced the revolutionaries to surrender. Egypt was added to a long list of British colonies, although it officially remained part of the Ottoman state. Through these methods, the Muslim world was made dependent on Europe. However, it is shocking to note that historian, Hans Kohn, believed that colonialism brought economic benefit to Asia and Africa. It is even more shocking when one notices how Hans Kohn set the “scholarly” pattern in writing colonial history. This is manifested well in the generalization on the impact of nationalism in the Muslim world.

The Question of Nationalism and Identity

The idea of nationalism originally surfaced in Europe. There is no precise and widely accepted definition of nationalism, but scholars agree with the view that the concept is represented in history by independent and sovereign nation-states which claim the exclusive loyalty of their citizens.³⁰ One historian noted this development in Europe as:

²⁹ It should be noted here that the Egyptian government had no foreign debt in 1850.

³⁰ On the history of the development of nationalism, see Carlton J.H. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan 1931) and Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955). Other works of these two famous students of nationalism convey the same message. On the question of loyalty, see Hayes,

... [a]n age when Christianity was in retreat, (where) nationalism became the dominant spiritual force in nineteenth-century European life. Nationalism provided new beliefs, martyrs, and “holy” days that stimulated feelings of reverence; it offered membership in a community, which satisfied an overwhelming psychological need of human beings for fellowship and identity. And nationalism supplied a mission – to which people could dedicate themselves.³¹

It is precisely on this question of loyalty with nationalism being a spiritual force that the concept clashes with that of *ummah*. Given that nationalism first developed in Europe, one needs to understand the concept as it developed in that region and then examine how it related to the emergence of nation-states in Muslim lands. A thorough examination of the growth of nationalist movements in the Muslim world is not within the scope of this paper; however, still one could make the following general observations.

Prior to the Renaissance there were hardly any traces of nationalism, either in Europe or in the Islamic world, for there were no nation-states in those days. The object of popular loyalty was religion; in Europe, it was Christianity,³² and in the Muslim world an individual’s primary loyalty was to the Islamic *ummah* and *shari’ah*. With the development of nationalism in Europe a Christian became an Englishman, a Frenchman, Spanish, or a member of one of the other nationalities. In the Muslim world, however, after the initial shock of colonial penetration, as Muslims realized that direct armed conflict against European powers would

77 and Kohn, 1. Also see K. W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

³¹ See Marvin Perry, ed., *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 2004), 553.

³² On the question of loyalty in European society in the Middle Ages, see Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York, 1933), 28.

not succeed, the struggle for self-rule took a new direction at the end of the 19th century. Muslim leaders recognized the backwardness of their society and began to encourage their people to learn European languages, science and philosophy. In the process, they also learned about nationalism and began to argue for liberty and self-rule on European terms.³³ They argued that they were different from their European masters and that they would like to be governed by their own national cultures and values which were recognized and accommodated by the values of Europe. One must note the sharp distinction between development of nationalism in Muslim countries and in European countries, however. While European Enlightenment intellectuals approached the study of society as a reaction against the Church and its role in governing society, something which gradually secularized the notion of law and government, Muslim intellectuals in the 19th century were conditioned by the colonization of their lands. Therefore, while the traditional symbols of nationalism were secularized in Europe, they nevertheless still carried religious weight in Muslim surroundings: while the Europeans found satisfaction in sacrificing their lives for the glory of the nation, Muslims were satisfied with martyrdom and reward in the Hereafter.

The earliest works on nationalism in Muslim countries were published in the 1920s. Two major books on the subject were published, both of which were written by Hans Kohn (whom we have already encountered), a Hungarian-born journalist who participated in the Zionist student movement and who was influenced by neo-romantic German nationalism before the First World War.³⁴ Later scholars of nationalism depended heavily on Hans Kohn's works, as we shall demonstrate in the following

³³ It, however, would be a mistake to assume that this was a deliberate choice of Muslim intellectuals. This was rather a natural outcome of their study of European civilization.

³⁴ Hans Kohn, *A History of Nationalism in the East* (New York: Harcourt, 1992) and *Nationalism and Imperialism in the Hither East* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), originally published in Germany, in 1926. For Kohn's background, see the preface to his book *A History of Nationalism in the East*.

pages. Kohn traveled widely in the Middle East as a correspondent for the German newspapers, *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Neue Zurkher Zeitung*. Kohn believed that Muslim countries were going through a secularization process similar to that of Europe. After observing the development of nationalist ideas in Asia, he noted:

A few years back religion was the determining factor in the East. Nationalism is not ousting religion, but more or less rapidly taking a place beside it, frequently fortifying it, beginning to transform and impair it. National symbols are acquiring religious authority and sacramental inviolability. The truth which men will defend with their lives is no longer exclusively religious; on occasion even it is no longer religious at all, but in increasing measure national.³⁵

Kohn further observed:

Only twenty-five years ago the Turks, the Arabian, and the Egyptians described themselves first and foremost Mohammedans. They were not yet conscious of ethnical designations, or only accorded secondary consideration. Today the Mohammedan is primarily a member of his nation or a citizen of his state and afterwards a Mohammedan.³⁶

On the basis of these observations, Kohn formed a theory in the study of social change. He said: "Nationalism takes the place of religion as the principle of governing all social and intellectual life."³⁷ We shall demonstrate later, however, that Kohn was wrong. For the moment, however, we shall focus on how his expertise on the issue influenced later scholars.

³⁵ Hans Kohn, *Nationalism and Imperialism in the Hither East*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24

³⁷ Hans Kohn, *A History of Nationalism in the East*, 8.

A widely-quoted scholar on nationalism, Harvard professor Rupert Emerson, generalized a theory that “the rise of nationalism coincides with the decline in the hold of religion”. He supported his view by citing Kohn and suggesting:

He formulated a universal sociological view which he saw as signifying the transition from medieval to modern forms of organization: religious groupings lost power when they confronted with the consciousness of a common nationality and speech.³⁸

Following Kohn’s “universal sociological theory”, Rupert Emerson again theorized the growth of nation-states in Asia and Africa saying that:

The nations have come to be accepted as taking priority over claims coming from other sources. Family, tribe, locality, religion, conscience, economic interest and a host of other appeals may at any given time and place prevail over national allegiance for particular individuals or groups. But it is the characteristic feature of the national era that for most man the national allegiance takes precedence over all other claims which may be made upon them when they are confronted with alternative choices of allegiances, as most strikingly in time of war.³⁹

This “universal sociological theory” became the fundamental stumbling block for a fair understanding of Muslim consciousness. This theory seems to subscribe to the view that religions emerged in history out of human fear of death.

³⁸ See Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise of Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1960), 158, and the corresponding note on page 436.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

This “universal sociological theory” was then applied by historians of nationalism in the context of the Muslim world. Erwin I. J. Rosenthal observed: “We witness today a vulnerable Islam gradually giving way before a secular nationalism ... the classical concept of Islam's religious and political unity is now threatened by the notion - arising from the effects of the French Revolution - of the separation of religion and politics.”⁴⁰ The observation of the second scholar, Bernard Lewis, is even more direct in pointing out the impact secularism had on modern Islam. Referring to the mission of the Prophet of Islam, Lewis says: “Another such struggle is being fought in our own time - not against Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza (pre-Islamic objects of worship) - but a new set of idols called states, races, nations; this time it is the idols that seem to be victorious.”⁴¹

Noting the role religious ideas played in many wars of independence in Asia and Africa, one sociologist stated that “in traditional societies religion is a mass phenomenon, politics is not; in transitional societies religion can serve as the means by which the masses become politicized.”⁴² Following this theory, one Turkish scholar claims with regard to the role of Islam in Turkish society:

In the case of countries under colonial rule with incipient nationalist movements, religion became a symbol of identity with the cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples which the colonial powers had attempted to destroy. Hence religion was used as an effective tool for social and political mobilization by nationalist leaders bent upon implanting a sense of pride in national culture and values.⁴³

⁴⁰ E.I.J Rosenthal, *Islam in the Modern Nation State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), xii-xiii.

⁴¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 70.

⁴² Donald E. Smith, *Religion and Political Development* (Boston: Little Brown, 1970), 124.

⁴³ Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp. 36-7. For a similar view on the role of religion in Africa and Asia

Concluding Remarks

Clearly there has been a misconstruction of the modern history of the Muslim world. Whether this misconstruction and misinterpretation has been created deliberately or this is an accidental phenomenon is a debatable question. One could argue that this was purposely done in order to justify neo-colonialism and support such views by establishing intellectual superiority on the subject. One could also argue that these views were introduced to simplify the understanding about the human nature. The view that Europe has pioneered contemporary world civilization and whatever has happened in Europe must follow in other parts of the world. Treatment of these questions demands wider scope than one short article. These questions, however, are very important for both social sciences and humanities. Any contribution in this regard will aid in finding the truth and thus, in our opinion, help understand the interaction of East and West in the colonial days better.

see Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: the Rise of Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), particularly 158-69.