

The Fiction of Nationalism

Leon Effendi Baos was the grandson of an Ottoman military physician who had moved his family from Greece to Iraq, sometime during the nineteenth century. Under Ottoman law, his father was considered Greek. In 1897, when war broke out between Greece and the Ottoman Khilafah, his father took an oath of allegiance to retain citizenship within the Khilafah.

After the partition of the Ottoman territories in 1918 by the Allied Forces, Baos was granted Arab citizenship. In 1919, Baos wrote a letter to the British High Commissioner seeking to understand how he could be forced to become an Arab. He also wondered how exactly the British could conjure up “Hedjaz, Mesopotamia, Transjordanie, Egypt, and Turkey and now force people to become subjects of these new born countries”. The British mandate officers never addressed his concerns and his case remained unresolved.

In 1921, the British government established the Emirate of Transjordan and granted ruling to Abdullah, the brother of King Faysal. The region was carved out by British officers to serve as a prize to Abdullah for his role in the Arab revolt as well as to serve as a buffer zone between Syria and Palestine. This came after attempts by the General Syrian Congress (GSC) to oppose the separation of Palestine from Syria by the British, and its colonialization by Zionist settlements.

In 1924, after the abolition of the Khilafah (Caliphate) by Mustafa Kemal, Sharif Husayn, who had been granted the title “King of Hejaz” by the British after launching the Arab revolt, proclaimed himself the new Khalifah. However, his reign as Khalifah was short-lived. The British colonial officers shifted their support from Husayn to Ibn Saud who, in 1925, captured Mecca and sent Husayn into exile. Ibn Saud declared himself the new “King of Hejaz”.

Later, in 1932, the Saud family united their territories in the Hejaz and Nejd regions to make the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 1936, when the French drafted a treaty for Lebanon, protests broke out in Beirut, Sidon, and Tripoli, all demanding union with Syria. These protests were ignored by the French mandate officers who continued with their plans to keep Syria separated from Lebanon.

All of these territories were once a part of the Ottoman Caliphate. And like Baos pointed out in his letters, the nation-states that were built upon them were nothing more than artificial constructions by colonial officers.

After the colonialists had divided up the Muslim world, they worked towards changing its system of governance. Parliamentary systems were introduced and the colonial officers would only engage with their subjects if they agreed to organize themselves in the form of democratic parties. Those who were brought into power by the colonialists were those who accepted their laws and principles. The emergence of nation-states in the Muslim world is therefore inextricably linked to a history of colonialism and coercion by European powers who wanted to see the Muslim world divided.

The question, then, is why do we continue to accept this form of governance for ourselves? The answer, perhaps, can be found in what Ibn Khaldun (rh) wrote centuries ago in his Muqaddimah.

Ibn Khaldun (rh) wrote, أن المغلوب مولع أبداً بالافتداء بالغالب في شعاره وزيه ونحلته وسائر أحواله وعوائده والسبب في ذلك أن النفس أبداً تعتقد الكمال في من غلبها وانقادت إليه إما لنظره بالكمال بما وفر عندها من تعظيمه أو لما تغالط به من أن انقيادها ليس لغلب طبيعي إنما هو لكمال الغالب. The defeated is always keen to imitate the victor in his slogan, dress, sect, and all his conditions and customs. The reason for this is that the soul always believes in perfection in the one who has defeated it, and he has submitted to. It is either because he sees perfection in what he has provided him, with of glorification of him, or it is because he is deceived by the fact that his submission is not due to the nature of victory itself, but instead due to the perfection of the victor.”

With the recent crisis in Palestine, it has become critical that the Muslim world begin to re-evaluate its form of governance and its adoption of Western principles. The “superior” West is what was responsible for the creation of the Zionist state that today commits genocide against the Muslims of Palestine. Its actions are justified by the language of the nation-state (the “right to statehood”, the “right to protect borders”) and it is this same language that the governments of the Muslim world use to justify their lack of action against the Zionist regime.

Ibn Khaldun (rh)’s point is that instead of assuming that the victor is perfect, we must consider the reasons for the defeat. It was the abandonment of the Shariah and the abolishment of the Khilafah by Mustafa Kemal that placed the Muslim world in its humiliating state today. It is only through the revival of the Shari’a and the restoration of the Khilafah that the Muslim world can overcome their present conditions. ﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾ **“Allah has promised those among you who believe, and do righteous good deeds, that He will certainly grant them succession to (the present rulers) in the earth, as He granted it to those before them, and that He will grant them the authority to practise their religion, that which He has chosen for them (i.e. Islam).”** [Surah An Nur v55]

It was narrated that Jundab bin 'Abdullah said, “The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, **«مَنْ قَاتَلَ تَحْتَ رَايَةٍ عَمِيَّةٍ يُقَاتِلُ عَصَبِيَّةً وَيَغْضَبُ لِعَصَبِيَّةٍ فَقَتَلَتْهُ جَاهِلِيَّةٌ»** **“Whoever fights for a cause that is not clear, advocating tribalism, getting angry for the sake of tribalism, then he has died a death of Jahiliyyah.”** Imam an-Nawawi said in his Sharh, **«وَأَمَّا يَغْضَبُ لِعَصَبِيَّةٍ لَا لِنُصْرَةِ الدِّينِ، وَالْعَصَبِيَّةُ إِعَانَةُ قَوْمِهِ عَلَى الظُّلْمِ** Tribal partisanship is supporting his nation in oppression.” The word asabiyah refers to tribalism and all its related ideas such as nationalism. There are many ahadith that discuss how much tribalism is hated in Islam. As Muslims, we unify through Islam, our Islamic identity is dominant over everything else. Otherwise, our death is likened to the death of ‘Jahiliyyah,’ as if we were not Muslim. We die sinful.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Khalil Musab – Wilayah Pakistan**