



False Independence: Colonialism's Most Notorious Achievement

Colonialism's most notorious achievement was not that it occupied our lands, plundered our resources, and exploited our economies for its own interests. Its most notorious achievement was that, before leaving our lands, it succeeded in establishing an entire world within our minds, a mindset that continued to exist long after colonialist rule had formally ended.

The armies withdrew, the colonialist flags came down, and new faces appeared in the halls of power. Yet, the map created by colonialism remained. It was not merely the map that survived; so did the ideas, interests, identities, and dispositional distancing attached to it.

At one time, regions that formed part of a broader political and civilizational whole were divided into separate entities by newly drawn borders. These nationalistic borders were then transformed from mere geographical lines into defining elements of identity. Gradually, a generation emerged for whom a person living on the other side of the nationalistic border, no matter how closely connected by language, religion, culture, or history, became a "foreigner."

Today, if a Muslim begins to regard another Muslim, essentially like himself, as a "foreigner" simply because the other person holds a different passport, we must ask ourselves: **Is this division confined to the map, or has it also taken root in our minds?**

This was colonialism's extraordinary stroke of evil genius: it did not merely divide the land; it embedded that division in our minds as well.

Then, separate institutions were established for each new state. Distinct political interests emerged, different economic priorities were defined, and separate national narratives began to take shape. Education, the media, and political discourse gradually reinforced the idea that our true identity lay within our borders, and that the boundaries of our loyalty ended there.

The process was so subtle that we hardly even noticed it.

This is where colonialism achieved its most notorious achievement.

Foreign occupation is visible, but mental occupation is not. When a foreign army is stationed in a country, subjugation is obvious. The uniform of the occupying soldier, his flag, and his orders constantly remind people that they are not free. But when the same system begins to operate through local institutions, local politics, local languages, and local slogans, oppression changes its appearance. And then **servitude begins to look like independence.**

That is why genuine independence does not simply mean that foreign soldiers have left our soil, nor does it mean merely taking down one flag and raising another.

If the decisions are made by us, but the priorities and standards belong to someone else; if the institutions are ours but their direction is determined elsewhere; if

our economy remains bound by the interests and conditions of foreign powers; if our educational system remains disconnected from our own civilizational priorities; and if our political thinking remains confined by concepts originally designed to divide us, then we must ask ourselves a difficult question:

Have we truly become independent, or have we merely changed our rulers?

The first stage of genuine independence is the liberation of the mind.

True independence begins when we stop merely answering questions handed down to us by others and begin asking our own questions.

For genuine independence, we must determine:

- What is our identity?
- Where do our collective interests lie?
- What determines our priorities and standards?
- What purpose should our economy serve?
- And whose interests should our politics represent?
- What conception of the human being should our education nurture?
- What should be the standard by which we judge our political decisions?

Because if we do not make our own decisions, someone else inevitably will. And if we do not define our own priorities, someone else will define them for us.

The most dangerous form of slavery is the one in which the slave can no longer see his chains.

And the tragedy of slavery in the modern age is that it does not arrive wearing chains. Sometimes it comes in the form of debt; sometimes in the name of mutual interest; sometimes accompanied by promises of development; sometimes under the banner of a global necessity; and sometimes by becoming part of our own way of thinking.

The independence of our land matters, but the independence of our minds matters far more. For a mind that has learned even the meaning of freedom from its captor may continue to make decisions like a slave, even on free soil, and continue to think within the very framework that was designed to keep it subjugated.

Colonialism will suffer its greatest defeat on the day we not only find the courage to transcend the artificial nationalistic borders it created, but also to break beyond the boundaries of the mindset it left behind.

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