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# The resurfacing of European colonialism

Decolonialism was forced on Europe abruptly without preparation. As a result, the continent never went through a process of mental decolonization. Is this the reason Europe increasingly behaves in neocolonialist ways?

• GOL KALEV

At the beginning of the 20th century, Europe was on top of the world. European nations controlled the global economy, wielded unparalleled influence on global affairs and possessed overseas assets – colonies in Asia and Africa. The colonialist mentality was core to what it meant to be European and was intertwined with the knowledge that 20 centuries of European global domination were natural and everlasting. That era’s intellectuals, such as Martin Zweig, wrote

AN OLD map presents Europe in the shape of a queen holding scepter and orb, with Portugal as her crown, Spain as her face, France as her below-the-neck area, lower Germany and Denmark as her left arm, Italy as her right arm (with Sicily as orb), and the rest of central and eastern Europe as the dress covering her torso and legs. (Wikimedia Commons)

about the prevailing certainty that “such stability would last forever.” But within a brief 30-year period from 1914 to 1948, that stability has shuttered: Wars erupted, killing millions of Europeans; centuries-old European empires collapsed; and power swiftly shifted from Europe to the United States. As a result, Europe was forced to put a halt to its colonialist activities and eventually cede those overseas territories that it assumed would be held forever. Decolonization occurred both unwillingly and unexpectedly. In the 70 years that followed, Europe took reactionary measures in response to these radical changes. Dr. Amichai Magen, head of the Diplomacy and

DR. SARA Wallace Goodman of University of California, Irvine: ‘We now know residency is not the silver bullet to integration.’ (Courtesy)

DR. AMICHAJ Magen (right), head of the Diplomacy and Conflict program at the Lauder School of Government-IDC Herzliya: Need for redefinition. (Courtesy)



Conflict program at the Lauder School of Government-IDC Herzliya, explains that Germany, Italy and other European powers needed to redefine themselves in light of the horrors of the Holocaust and World War II. “Europe sought to reinvent itself as a post-nationalist, and in some respects, post-modern entity, rejecting hard power. As part of this identity construction, Europe tried to redefine itself as a human-rights civilian superpower.”

While Europe has put in place mechanisms to neutralize what it perceived were the causes of its 20th-century wars, it took no measures to address the other Earth-shattering events that occurred at the same time: the abrupt loss of power and the psychological undoing of its deeply-rooted colonialist mentality, such as the notion of European superiority and Europe’s patronizing attitude toward the Third World.

Magen puts those 70 years in context: “From the end of World War II until about 2015, Europeans felt that they were largely insulated from the more tumultuous parts of the world they previously controlled as colonialist masters. They were under an American security umbrella and enjoyed growing prosperity at home. This perception of glorious insulation allowed Europe to invest in its newly found identity: Position itself as a soft power, distinguish itself from the ‘American cowboy,’ and fashion itself as a moral nanny to the world.”

But that insularity came to an end in recent years with waves of terrorism and immigration. Suddenly, the moral nanny began facing moral challenges.

Arguably, having failed to go through a process of mental decolonization back then, Europe is now re-

acting to those challenges with traces of its colonialist way of thinking.

This includes the underlying belief that Europe can bring in people from Third World countries, and that once in Europe, such immigrants will happily embrace European culture and values. After all, who does not want to be enlightened and Europeanized?

There is a healthy debate in Europe about whether to welcome or reject immigrants, but there is general agreement that Europe should reject the immigrants’ way of life.

THEREFORE, MASSIVE budgets have been allocated to “integration.” Dr. Sara Wallace Goodman of University of California, Irvine claims that a turning point occurred when governments stepped in to handle integration: “There was an assumption early on that residency will lead to integration – that over time this or the next generation will integrate. We now know residency is not the silver bullet to integration. Not only that, it became clear that there is a deliberate lack of integration. People were self-selecting to be part of insular communities. When this became clear, governments stepped in.”

Some acknowledge that such government intervention – teaching the newcomers the European ways – is somewhat reminiscent of 19th-century colonialist programs to enlighten the “primitives,” but that this time such policies are legitimate, since the “natives” are coming into Europe, not Europe going to the natives. The principle of indigeneity, the argument goes, means that European whites and their way of life have superior claims to Europe than that of incoming Asians, Africans and Muslims.

But such an argument by itself can deteriorate into a debate that hits the essence of European indigeneity: Who was here first? For example, Europeans teach their children about the Reconquista completed in the 15th century – the reconquering of European territory that was occupied by Muslims for 800 years. Some Muslims teach the same events as European colonialism – displacing the Muslim indigenous population that lived in Spain for 800 years, because of a white European claim that their ancestors lived there in ancient times.

The moral debate over integration is also a debate about the core of European liberalism. For example, both France and Switzerland have openly denied citizenship to Muslim women who qualified and were



‘SHOULD GERMAN become an official language of Italy?’: Plaque in both Italian and German at at a German-language primary school in South Tyrol, Italy. (Wikimedia Commons)



‘THE PLUM Pudding in Danger,’ James Gillray, 1805. This editorial cartoon depicts caricatures of the British prime minister William Pitt the Younger and newly crowned emperor of France Napoleon, both wearing military uniforms, carving up a terrestrial globe into spheres of influence. (Wikimedia Commons)

approved – solely because they refused to abandon their religious beliefs that prohibit them from having physical contact with men, including handshakes.

Similarly, armed French policemen approaching a Muslim woman on the beach in Nice and ordering her to take her top off would be a clear case of sexual assault in the United States, Israel, Britain and other Western democracies. But police actions were greeted with support across France.

Goodman claims that this is symptomatic of a fundamental wedge between American and French interpretations of liberalism: “If a girl is not allowed to wear a hijab to school in America, people would say that this is not fair, the girl can wear whatever she wants. In France, people would say the girl is not deciding for herself, the community decides for her, and we are freeing the girl.”

Is such European thinking by itself a symptom of colonialism? After all, the notion that Europe knew better was a core colonialist concept. The recurring episodes of Muslim women on the beach being fined or removed by police creates a sad reality in France and elsewhere in Europe. Thousands of Muslim women simply did not go to the beach last summer. This occurred while Orthodox Jewish women and Roman Catholic nuns were allowed to go and keep their clothes. Some argue that this is a form of European apartheid that goes to the core of its colonialism mentality: The beach, the lake and public spaces have different rules for Muslims and white Europeans.

Traces of European colonialism are not limited just to Europe but are also reflected in European attitudes elsewhere.

For example, Europe bizarrely decided to criticize Israel's recently enacted Nation-State Law, which reaffirmed that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people.

WHILE THERE is a robust internal debate in Israel about aspects of the law, its wording and message – the essence of the law has been deeply rooted in the Israeli consensus since its founding. More than 99%

of Israeli Jews vote for parties that strongly embrace this Zionist notion. Not only that, but such a Zionist concept has been broadly accepted by Europe and the international community.

The European Union's official expression of concern over passage of the law, which is a softer version of similar laws that exist in Europe, should raise European eyebrows.

Is the EU suggesting that German-speaking Tyroleans have national claims to Italy? Should German become an official language of Italy? Similarly, is the EU making an implicit statement about Corsican national rights in France, Sami rights in Sweden and about other European minorities' national aspirations?

But the more worrisome red flag raised with the EU's strange criticism of the Israeli law is the implication for Europe's Muslim population. Is the EU implying that Arabic should become an official language of France? And is the EU insinuating that going forward, claiming that France is French would be deemed racist? More broadly, should Muslims have national rights in France and other European countries?

Or perhaps the EU criticism of the Israeli law can simply be dismissed as a colonialist-type behavior – having rules for Europe that differ from rules for others.

Magen puts such seemingly irrational European behavior in the context of European evolution: “Part of the European posture as a moral superpower included deeply paternalistic attitudes toward both Israelis and Palestinians. That includes the notion that Europe's moral judgment is superior to that of the Israelis and should trump the Israel democratic process – Israelis need to be rescued from themselves.”

European neocolonialist behavior toward Israel pales in comparison to European condescension and outright colonialist attitudes toward the Palestinians.

As in colonialist times, Europe is now putting in place structures that create dependency of the natives on Europe. This is done by funding and politically supporting organizations that perpetuate the conflict, such as UNWRA and various NGOs, as well as by EU's own

actions, statements and policies. In particular, European neocolonialist policies come to bear in its deliberate and relentless efforts to sabotage Palestinian employment in Jewish-owned businesses in the West Bank.

For example, SodaStream came under intense European pressure to shut its operation in the West Bank and move its factory to central Israel. As a result, 500 Palestinians lost their jobs. SodaStream is viewed as a European success story. The fact that 500 natives lost their job seems of little concern to Europe in pursuing its neocolonialist policies.

As with colonialism, Europe justifies its actions through a puppet regime it supports. In the Palestinian case, the EU has been a financial and political supporter of the Palestinian Authority, which Palestinians view as a detached, corrupt entity with limited connection to the local population. Many Palestinians feel that the so-called “Tunisians,” who were brought in by Israel with the help of Europe and the international community, are just another form of occupier. Surveys show that Palestinian public support of the PA is abysmally low.

MAGEN POINTS out that the European effort to turn the PA into the Palestinian state is another example of the discrepancy between European policies at home and abroad: “Europe has put in place standards on whether a country can join the EU, such as respect to human rights and democracy, as well as other governance standards that would ensure Europe's security. But those standards get abandoned when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Europe seems perfectly prepared to be the midwife of a failed Palestinian state that is deeply corrupt, dictatorial and dysfunctional, and therefore would immediately threaten the security of Israel, Jordan and other counties in the region.

Europe's morality issue was displayed to the world when the EU passed a directive requiring special marking of products made by Jewish-owned business in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Europe's intended targets were those Israeli businesses it tries to intercept, but the real victims of such European colonialist aggression were the Palestinians. What problem does Europe have with Palestinians joining a hi-tech startup? Why do Europeans have an issue with Palestinians being mentored by Israelis to become hi-tech entrepreneurs, scientists or innovators?

When the European colonial era is studied in the future, it is possible the EU product-labeling directive and attitudes toward Palestinians will be showcased as some of the most profound and outrageous acts of European colonialism.

European neocolonialist attitudes trickle down to the individual level in the streets of Europe. Europeans who hijack the Palestinian cause to promote their own interests tend to be much more combative. For example, “Pro-Palestinian” demonstrators in Europe, at times carrying Hezbollah flags, often call to “end the genocide in Palestine” and the “massacre in Gaza” – messages out of touch with the Palestinian narrative and realities.

Traces of European colonialism in its contemporary behavior could serve as a reminder that shocking events, such as decolonization, take time to adjust to, and failure to adjust could have dangerous and immoral consequences.

This was the case with another radical shift that occurred in Europe: the 19th-century emancipation of European Jews after centuries of oppression. While Jews welcomed their new rights, one Jewish thinker was surprisingly critical. In 1895, as he was crafting his vision of a Jewish transformation, Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism, wrote a letter to Otto von Bismarck, the father of a United Germany and its first chancellor. Herzl argued that the emancipation of the Jews, which happened swiftly and without preparation of the hearts



A 'BURKINI'-CLAD woman walks in the water on a beach in Marseille, France, in August 2016. (Reuters)



AN ARMED Palestinian woman burns Israeli and European Union flags during a protest against Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip and Lebanon, in Gaza, July 2006. (Reuters)

and minds, was only relevant to politicians, not to the populace: “There is no use in suddenly announcing in the newspaper that starting tomorrow all people are equal,” he proclaimed.

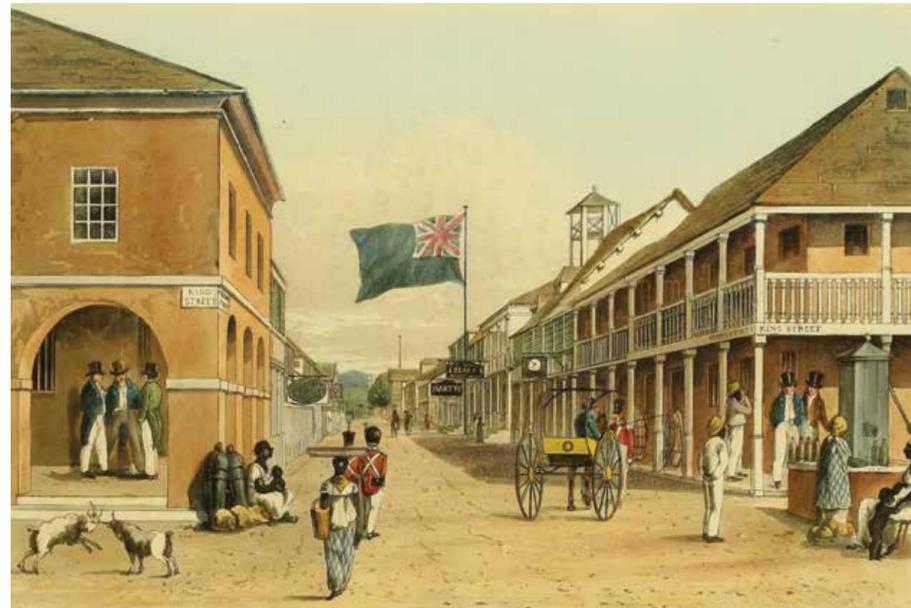
Herzl's warning turned out to be correct: Europeans did not come to terms with the newly liberated Jews, suddenly their equals. That was evident in France during the Dreyfus affair and a few decades later in the

genocide of European Jewry.

Lessons from the European reaction to the emancipation can be applied to European reactions to other radical changes. Failure to prepare the hearts and minds for their fall from grace and abrupt decolonization has arguably taken a moral toll on Europe today. But Europe can fix that. Perhaps it can start right in the state that Herzl envisioned and, at last, end its

neocolonialist, disruptive intervention in Israeli and Palestinian affairs. This way, the chances for peace will increase and Europe can redirect its capital and efforts to addressing its challenges at home.

*The writer covers Zionism, Europe and global affairs, analyzing long-term shifts and applying historical perspectives. His articles are featured on Europeandjerusalem.com*



COLONIZED: 'A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica,' James Hakewill, 1820. Jamaica was variously an English colony from 1655 (when it was captured by the English from Spain) or 1670 (when Spain formally ceded Jamaica to the English), and a British Colony from 1707 until 1962, when it finally became independent. (Wikimedia Commons)

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