**[The anti-colonialist](https://www.dawn.com/news/1783551/the-anti-colonialist)**

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THE history of South Asia and most other outposts of the British (or the Dutch or French) is replete with the struggles of the ancestors of contemporary populations against colonisers who occupied the subcontinent for over two centuries.

The sum total of post-colonial history taught in most of the countries created as the sun set on the British Empire are, in fact, a compendium of the struggles of heroic fighters and thinkers who paved the way for independence.

Generations of people educated in these post-colonial nations have grown up with a consciousness of a once-glorious past that was interrupted by the machinations of colonial powers, who inveigled their way into South Asia or Africa or any of the many other places that were ‘discovered’ by white explorers in their quest to find resources to monopolise, people to subjugate, and lands to occupy.

The advent of the British East India Company or the Dutch East India Company saw the deployment of ‘trade’ interests that sought to amass raw material that the future colonisers set about gathering up.

Everyone knows what happened next: trade gave way to administration, and doddering monarchies or tribal kingdoms were converted into colonies that were administered and then ruled by the white men who had first presented their presence and their intentions as benign.

The history of colonialism and the fact that it led to the looting of vast portions of the world for the benefit of white and Western home populations is thus well known by those who suffered under the yoke of colonial occupation. It is, however, markedly less well known by the populations of colonising nations.

In the UK, many still insist that the British colonisers were ‘benevolent’ and brought only good things to the subcontinent, notwithstanding the compelling evidence of carnage or pillage of former colonies. There is still less awareness of the hobbling of long-existing systems of law, administration and cultural production that followed colonisation.

For all the good intentions of post-colonial historians, their efforts of the past half century have seemed mostly futile.

Academic departments in the UK and US have attempted to correct this incorrect recollection of the past. In the American context, post-colonial historians have focused on the lie behind the much-popularised premise that the explorer Christopher Columbus ‘discovered’ America as an example of how the presence of Native Americans has been erased in American history to give the impression that America was somehow less real until the white colonisers arrived.

They have also focused on the systematic annihilation of Native Americans by white settler-colonialists so that a vast continent would become their own.

For all the good intentions of post-colonial historians, their efforts of the past half century have seemed mostly futile. Why, many readers of post-colonial history wondered, would anyone care about how the white and Western world had amassed its cultural, historical and material wealth when they did not have to.

Several demographic and racial transformations of the Western world have occurred over the years. In the UK, British Muslim populations — the progeny of labourers who had migrated from Pakistan, entered a third generation. The children of the formerly colonised are now a part of the former colonial power.

In the US, the efforts of Black Americans, whose ancestors had been forced onto ships as human cargo of the Atlantic slave trade, exposed how so much of the country had been built by the formerly enslaved. The exploitation of these slaves and the organised campaign against Native Americans took place simultaneously.

In the case of Native Americans, historians pointed out, entire tribes were decimated and their lands taken over and occupied, often through the use of despicable tactics such as distributing blankets infected with smallpox.

Even so, the prospects of post-colonial history and the anti-colonial struggle seemed dim in its capacity to stop future occupations. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan seemed to offer proof of this as neo-colonial settlers from the US/Nato set about undertaking a second such campaign. Post-colonial history seemed to have failed to do what knowledge of the past hopes to do; ie, change the behaviour of actors who learn about it.

Just when this appeared to be the way things would be, there were some unexpected stirrings of change. Following the Israeli bombardment and blockade of Gaza, an unprecedented wave of support for the Palestinian people has been seen in the US, the UK and even places like Germany and the Netherlands. In the US, Palestinian activists have been assisted by Black Lives Matter organisers, who have helped them put together well-organised and enormous protests and demonstrations all across the country.

While pro-Israeli voices have dominated the elite academia and business, student bodies and public protests have been dominated by slogans of ‘Free Palestine’. The anti-settler colonial narrative that has been behind denouncing the ‘discovery’ of America with the arrival of white people and the occupation of Native American lands has joined hands with movements like Black Lives Matter, which has an anti-racist agenda, to produce mass sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people.

In the UK, the demographics of cities like London, which now have large Muslim populations, have also contributed to an otherwise unprecedented groundswell of support. Of course, other factors, such as the availability of Palestinian voices on social media, have bolstered sympathy for them too.

Similarly, American misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq have made young people far more sceptical of occupation by colonialists than their ancestors might have been.

Even so, the change in world opinion and the willingness of protesters to denounce what Israel has done to promote an apartheid state, signal the possibility that the critique of history put forth by the formerly conquered and colonised may finally have seeped into the world’s consciousness.

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