



Out of the Shadow of Colonialism

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If our faces were not similar, we could not distinguish man from beast; if they were not dissimilar, we could not distinguish man from man.

– Michel de Montaigne

Abstract: The 15th-century Renaissance lifted Europe from the medieval to the modern era, helping the continent to develop industrially and economically through the spread of knowledge in art, music, literature, religion, politics, and every other field. With the new-found knowledge Europeans ventured abroad to Asia, Africa, America, and the South Seas. They colonized countries and continents, denigrating the native populations by distorting history and making claims like Christianity is a Western religion and they are a “White” race. This paper delves into history and mythology to show, with the support of the views of superior minds, that the imperialists’ claims were spurious and self-serving, made to hide their rapacious desire for the resources of their colonies. Though European colonization ended long ago in most parts of the world, its detrimental effects still linger. Hence, history must be related honestly and truthfully to remove the vestiges of colonialism from our minds and from our language. Then we can realize the multicultural nature of the world, where contributions of all people are acknowledged and respected.

Keywords: Renaissance, social advancement, colonialism, perversion of history, Western religion, “White” race, discrimination, decolonization, multicultural, social harmony.

Europe’s rise to industrial and economic development can be traced back to the 15th-century Renaissance – a French word meaning rebirth, rebirth of the European heritage. Europeans went back to studying the Latin and Greek writers and philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who had been banned by the Roman Catholic Church in European schools for nine hundred years, from the 6th to the 15th century. As it spread all over the continent from its birthplace in Florence, Italy, the Renaissance propelled Europe from the Middle Ages, often referred to as the Dark Ages, to the modern era with advances in every field – art, science, literature, religion,

philosophy, education, music, and politics – ultimately giving birth to imperialism.

This was the Age of Exploration (or the Age of Discovery) when the Italian navigator Christopher Columbus, sponsored by the Catholic monarchs, found the sea route to the Americas. In 1492 he landed at Guanahani, an island in the Bahamas, and established a colony in what is known today as Haiti, opening the door for European conquests, colonization, exploitation, depopulation, and slavery. The Portuguese Vasco da Gama voyaged to India by way of Cape of Good Hope, landing in Calicut (now Kozhikode) in 1498. Subsequent voyages by him, the Dutch, the French, and the English followed, paving the way for occupation and colonization, the spice merchants of the British East India Company under the leadership of the ruthless sociopath Robert Clive finally establishing their colonial rule in India after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. After the battle, the Bengal treasury was looted, loaded into 100 boats, and taken to Fort William, the company's Kolkata headquarters. Clive also seized, in today's currency, £23 million for himself and £250 million for the company. When he returned to England, his plunder of Bengal made this corporate predator the richest self-made man in Europe with an estimated wealth valued at £234,000, about £50 million in today's currency.

This colonization was carried out in the name of civilizing the “natives,” which was done, especially in South America and Africa, but also in North America, India and other places, by converting the native people to Christianity in the name of civilization. This was evident in the English poet Rudyard Kipling's poem “The White Man's Burden”:

*Take up the White Man's burden –
Send forth the best ye breed –
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;*

*To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child. (1)*

Though the “captives” of this poem were the Filipinos, the stanza unqualifiedly encapsulates the racist sentiment of the European imperialists, who claimed to be a “White” race, implying that “the idea of European identity [is] a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures” (Said 7). But as the sage Emerson said: “The coarse and frivolous have an instinct of superiority” (295). Be that as it may, let us examine the imperialists’ claims of Christianity being a Western religion with which they were civilizing the world and the Europeans a “White” race, thereby superior, hold water. This paper delves into history and mythology to gauge the veracity of such assertions.

According to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who makes a clear distinction between the Greek concept of God and the Persian prophet Zarathustra’s concept of God, “The Homeric gods represent no moral ideals, but they express very characteristic mental ideals. They are not those functional and anonymous deities that have to watch over a special activity of man: they are interested in and favor individual men. Every god and goddess has his favorites who are appreciated, loved, and assisted, not on the ground of a mere personal predilection but by virtue of a kind of mental relationship that connects the god and the man” (98-99). In contrast to that “mental concept” of God, Zarathustra gives a moral concept of the deity. As Cassirer says, “In the religion of Zoroaster there is only one Supreme Being Ahura Mazda, the ‘wise lord.’ Beyond him, apart from him, and without him nothing exists. He is the first and foremost, the most perfect being, the absolute sovereign” (99). In this religion, “The Divine is no longer sought or approached by magical powers but by the power of righteousness,” . . . “the triad of ‘good thoughts, good

words, and good deeds” playing the leading part (100). This is the concept of monotheism in which Ahura was later called Ormazd (or Ormuzd), the good principle (or God) that is involved in an eternal struggle with Ahriman, the evil principle (the Devil). The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer maintains that “Jehovah is a transformation of Ormuzd and Satan of Ahriman . . . Ormuzd himself, however, is a transformation of Indra” (187). Indra is the god that represents the moral principle in the Indo-Aryan Vedas. Hence, we can conclude that, philosophically speaking, the concept of god as a moral principle is derived from the Vedas and that of monotheism was postulated by Zarathustra.

Mythologically, Christianity is based on the Hebrew tale of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and their eventual banishment from it. As Stephen Greenblatt writes in his best-selling book *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve: The Story that Created Us*, the Hebrews tried to find a creation story for themselves after they were freed from Babylonian captivity by the Persian King Cyrus; so they constructed a “counternarrative to the Babylonian creation story” (37) by “stitching together” stories that had been in existence for centuries to create the story of Adam and Eve. And according to ancient Hebrew tradition, claims Hans Biedermann, the four rivers surrounding Paradise are “Pison (Indus?), Gihon (Ganges?), Hikkedel (Tigris), and Euphrates” (285). In other words, Heaven is in the land between India and Iraq.

Jesus Christ, the God Christians worship for their salvation, was an Aramaic-speaking Palestinian who was born in Bethlehem. about whom the three wise men who came to Jerusalem after his birth said: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him” (Matt. 2:2, King James Version). So, according to the Bible, Jesus Christ is an Eastern star. That is why the great German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche calls Christ the “Oriental in heaven” (187-188).

From the above discussion, we see that both philosophically and mythologically, Christianity is not a Western (or European) religion, as imperialists claimed, but Eastern (or Oriental). Led by their colonial hubris and material interest, they even defied the Bible in their hypocritical claims (and continue to do so to this day). But to take Christianity to the East is like taking coal to Newcastle. The imperialists forgot that they themselves were converted to Christianity to worship the “Oriental” star and follow Oriental ideas and myths. If Christianity could civilize the world, the East was civilized long before Europe, at least 300 years before the Roman Emperor Constantine borrowed it from the Orient. But they employed the German-born British philologist Max Müller to create a distorted translation of the Vedas which, as I have explained above, gave us the idea of God as a moral principle, to smear Hinduism in order to impose Christianity on India. However, superior minds of Europe – those that were knowledgeable, wise, and honest – soundly repudiated the imperialists’ claims and their denigration of native cultures. For example, the preeminent German Romantic poet Wolfgang von Goethe. After reading the 14th-century Persian poet Hafiz, he was so impressed that he wrote a collection of poems called *West-östlicher Divan (West-East Divan)*. He said this about Hafiz: “In his poetry, Hafiz has inscribed undeniable truth indelibly. Hafiz has no peer” (qtd. in Pourafzal and Montgomery 8). The American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson claimed that “Hafiz sees too far; he sees throughout; such is the only man I wish to see or be” (qtd. in Pourafzal and Montgomery 8).

The similarities between Emerson’s philosophical views and Indian thought have been shown by V. K. Chari, who writes: “In his essay ‘Oversoul’ Emerson develops the concept of a transcendental self, the soul within man, the vast spiritual background and the substratum of all functions and states of consciousness. The resemblance between this idea and the

Upanishadic concept of *Atman-Brahman* is unmistakable” (931). And Malcolm Cowley, in his study of

Walt Whitman’s poetry, claims:

In “Song of Myself” as originally written, God is neither a person nor, in the strict sense, even a being; God is an abstract principle of energy that is manifested in every living creature, as well as in “the grass that grows wherever the land is and water is.” In some ways this God of the first edition resembles Emerson’s Oversoul, but he seems much closer to the Brahman of the Upanishads, the absolute, unchanging, all-enfolding Consciousness.

The Divine Ground from which all things emanate and to which all things may hope to return. And this Divine Ground is by no means the only conception that Whitman shared with Indian philosophers, in the days when he was writing “Song of Myself” (921-922).

The great introspective poet T. S. Eliot, in his landmark poem “The Waste Land,” turns to the Indian Upanishads for the virtues of “sympathy,” “sacrifice,” and “self-control” to save the modern profit-seeking, libidinous, and conflict-ridden world of hollow men devoid of spirituality.

The European imperialists also derided the native culture of Latin America, but Michel de Montaigne, the famous French philosopher, has this to say about the richness of the culture that they belittled:

As for pomp and magnificence . . . neither Greece nor Rome nor Egypt can compare any of its works, whether in utility or difficulty or nobility, with the road which is seen in Peru, laid out by the kings of the country, from the city of Quito as far as Cuzco (a distance of three hundred leagues), straight, even, twenty-five paces wide, paved, lined on both sides with fine high walls, and along these, on the inside, two ever-flowing streams, bordered by beautiful trees, which they call molly. Wherever they encountered mountains and rocks,

they cut through and leveled them, and filled the hollows with stone and lime. At the end of each day's journey there are fine palaces furnished with provisions, clothes, and arms, for travelers as well as for the armies that have to pass that way.
(698)

The imperialists wielded their power unabashed in their colonies till World War II, when the colonized people had not only to fight and die for the colonizers but also pay for a conflict not of their choosing, fueling resentment and revolt against the exploiters. So the devastated European nations had to relinquish most of their colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America – e.g., India (creating India and Pakistan), Ceylon, Indonesia, the Philippines, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Ghana, Congo, Belize, Guyana, Suriname – soon after the war, willingly or unwillingly. This process of decolonization is continuing, with the Caribbean island nation of Barbados declaring independence from Britain and Queen Elizabeth II in 2021, becoming a republic. Six other Caribbean nations – the Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Kitts and Nevis – are planning to leave the British monarchy.

A new consciousness has developed around the world in the 21st century regarding the injustices that the previously subjugated and subservient people had been subjected to by their conquerors. Hence, in the United States, thirteen states and the District of Columbia now observe Indigenous Peoples Day instead of Columbus Day – Alabama, Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin – to make people aware of the devastating effects of Columbus' arrival on the indigenous people of the Americas. Also, since the 1970s, the country has taken down at least 36 monuments to Columbus for his abusive treatment of native Americans.

Elsewhere, people are reclaiming their heritage and history just the way Europeans reclaimed theirs during the Renaissance when they went back to studying the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, now considered the founders of Western philosophy. A new-found pride that has dawned on formerly colonized people has motivated some of them to change the names of their countries former colonizers used. For example, Ceylon's name has been changed to Sri Lanka, Burma's to Myanmar, Southern Rhodesia's to Zimbabwe, Gold Coast's to Ghana, and Zaire's to Democratic Republic of Congo. During the G20 Summit in 2023 in New Delhi, the Indian government replaced "India," a name given by the Greeks and used by British imperialists, with the ancient name "Bharat" in dinner invitations to the G20 guests. Even names of states or provinces of India were changed. They are too numerous to name here. However, some famous cities deserve to be mentioned. The most famous of them is, of course, the financial and entertainment hub formerly called Bombay, a colonial name that was changed to Mumbai. Mysore was changed to Chennai, Calcutta to Kolkata, Bangalore to Bengaluru, Poona to Pune, and Cochin to Kochi, just to name a few.

This process of decolonization should also extend to Christianity. The imperialists claimed it to be a Western religion; however, as explained previously, philosophically, it is of Indian and Persian origin and, mythologically, it is of Hebraic or Afro-Asian origin. Hence, logically, it is an Eastern or Oriental religion. Besides, Christianity is also called an Abrahamic religion, like Judaism and Islam, for Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe they are the descendants of Abraham, who was born in Ur (now Basra), Iraq. In fact, Matthew Arnold, the 19th-century English poet recognized it in his famous book *Culture and Anarchy*: "Indo-European people vary from those of a Semitic people. Hellenism is of Indo-European growth. Hebraism is of Semitic growth; and we English, a nation of Indo-European stock, seem to belong

naturally to the movement of Hellenism” (95). But England has not relinquished Hebraism, or Christianity. In fact, the English King is the head of the Church of England. Hence, England has combined, like the rest of Europe, both Hellenism and Hebraism, merging West and East since the days of Constantine, the Roman Emperor who imported Christianity to Europe in 313 AD with the Edict of Milan. It is, therefore, logical to say that Europe became Easternized when it borrowed Christianity from the East; in other words, a multicultural society, to use a term much in vogue nowadays. But the imperialists did not recognize it – for which the word “Easternized” does not exist in the English dictionary – because of their nature of usurping others’ ideas, myths, heritage, history, land, and resources, claiming them to be theirs. To this day, church leaders as well as politicians promote the imperialist lie that Christianity is a Western religion, volubly crowing about “our Judeo-Christian heritage.” The duplicity in such a claim is evident in the very fact that Benjamin Disraeli, the British Prime Minister (1874-1880) of Jewish heritage who was baptized as a Christian, was called the “Oriental Prophet” by many politicians. It shows the Judeo-Christian heritage is in fact an Oriental heritage, not only according to Biblical mythology, philosophy, and scholars but also many political leaders. And when this heritage was mixed with the Greek or Hellenic heritage of Europe, it became multicultural. To be sure, there is nothing wrong in borrowing others’ ideas or heritage but credit must be given where credit is due. Otherwise, it is just appropriation, which the imperialists practiced shamelessly. Whether it’s others’ land, wealth, heritage, they claimed them to be theirs without saying thank you to the people from whom they appropriated them.

Let us now turn our attention to the claim of Europeans as a “White” race. It was, of course, done to portray the imperialists as superior to non-Europeans, as the quote above from Edward Said maintains. But they also claimed to be

Christians who believe, like Jews and Muslims, that they are children of Abraham, an Iraqi, and were created in the image of Jesus, a Palestinian who, according to scientists, was a swarthy man with curly black hair and beard. Now, if they are children of a non-European and created in the image of a non-European, who according to the imperialists, are non-White, how can they claim to be a “White” race? This is not only contradictory but also tantamount to hypocrisy. It reminds one of the apt phrase the eminent English novelist D. H. Lawrence used: “White bunk.”

When it comes to race, the U.S.A. has moved past the Europeans’ artificial construction of a “White” race and created a “White” category of its own. According to this categorization, not only Europeans but also Jews and Arabs in West Asia and North Africa are considered “White.” In other words, this categorization is based not on color or a particular geographical region but the Biblical tale of Adam and Eve which, according to Stephen Greenblatt, is pure fiction. For the U.S.A. to categorize a race based on such fiction is ridiculous to say the least for the fiction itself has no credibility to thinking people, as Greenblatt contends, but only to blind believers. Such categorization is arbitrary and meritless for it does not respect people’s heritage and people’s view of themselves. The creation of such a phony race is evidenced in the fact that the Europeans called Japanese a “Yellow” race and the U.S.A. calls “Asian,” but the Japanese see themselves as white (Noor 67). In fact, the former South African apartheid regime considered Japanese “White.” Various shades of white skin can be found not only in Europe but also all over the world – Japan, China, Iran, Afghanistan, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, West Asia, North Africa, and Latin America. So when a particular group of people claim the white color for itself, it deprives others of their color. That is exactly what the European imperialists did by claiming themselves to be a “White” race: they deprived others of their color. But such Euro-centric views of

imperialists are still found in books though we left behind colonialism over half a century ago. A good example of it is in Pankaj Mishra's otherwise very fine book *An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World*, where the author uses "white female tourists" (215) or "white men and women" (227-228) to mean none other than former European imperialists. It is hard to drive imperialists physically out of a country but it is even harder to cast off the warped worldview the imperialists have instilled in the minds of the conquered people. Denigration and exploitation were bad enough, but the worst was the cognitive manipulation, for which many formerly colonized people find themselves in the echo chamber of imperialists long after they are gone.

European imperialists' claims of Christianity being a Western religion and themselves a "White" race have not served them, and the world, well. In the Middle Ages, they discriminated against the Jewish people and it was based on the Christian belief that the Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus through the blood curse – the willingness of the Jewish people to accept liability for Jesus's death – his crucifixion – ordered by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who presided over the trial. They were massacred during the Crusades, beginning in 1095, and expelled from England in 1290 and from France in 1306 and 1394. They were massacred in Strasbourg in 1349 when the entire Jewish population was publicly burned to death. In Eastern Europe there were pogroms against them in Odessa (1881), Warsaw (1881), and Kiev (1905 and 1919). Hostility against the Jews increased with the Renaissance as the Europeans turned to the ancient Greeks and Romans as their intellectual ancestors. That began racial antisemitism against Jews, developed with the claim of the Europeans being a "White" race that was superior to other races, later bolstered by pseudo-scientific theories – now largely discredited – like Social Darwinism, advocated by Herbert Spencer and others to justify colonialism and racism. This led to the Holocaust, concentration camps, and gas

chambers of the German Nazis during World War II, where six million Jews perished. Though the Great War ended with the defeat of the Nazis, discrimination and violence against Jews and others considered to be “foreigners” in the West by the so-called “White Supremacists” have continued to this day. Here are a few of these incidents in the 21st century. In July 2011, 77 people were killed in Oslo and Utoya, Norway, by a man motivated by hatred of immigrants and those who supported them, the youth wing of the Norwegian Labor Party. In August 2012, six worshippers were killed in shooting in a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, U.S.A. In April 2014, three people were killed at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City and Village Shalom in Overland Park, Kansas, U.S.A. In June 2015, nine African Americans were shot to death during a Bible study at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, U.S.A. In August 2017, at a “White Supremacist” rally, Odinists – those who consider themselves children of Odin, the god in Norse mythology – marched with tiki torch, shouting “Jews will not replace us” in Charlottesville, Virginia, U.S.A., killing one counter protester. In October 2018, 11 worshippers were murdered in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. In March 2019, 51 people were killed in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. In August 2019, 23 Latinos were killed in a Walmart store in El Paso, Texas, U.S.A. This is the legacy of European imperialists who hypocritically claimed Christianity to be a Western religion and themselves a “White” race. Thus, they victimized others with a false narrative they promoted to valorize themselves with spurious claims.

From the above discussions, it is eminently clear that the legacies of colonialism have not served the imperialists, and humanity, well. The discrepancy between the historical truth, as the superior minds stated, and the politically motivated self-glorifying claims of imperialists has led and is still leading to social unrest and death. The imperialists’ spurious assertions made by perverting history have corrupted history

by corrupting the language, and according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language” (51). The corrupt imperialists replaced truth with deceit and falsity for the desires of riches and power, which has disrupted social harmony. The pogroms, expulsions, Holocausts, gas chambers, concentration camps, tiki torch marches, mass shootings, Jesus-hating Nazis with swastika flags, and phobias of all kinds could have been avoided by being true to history. We must clean the corrupt language by first cleaning the corruption within us by “purifying the mind,” to use Epictetus’s words, recognize the contributions of all people and describe them the way they see themselves, not what the imperialists made of them. Then we will realize that the “others” are within us and we are all multicultural. Thus, we will respect the diversity of human civilization, acknowledge the multicultural nature of the world, and establish social harmony and peace for the good of humanity.

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