

Is Colonization Possible During the Encounter Between Two Civilizations?

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Abstract

This paper explores the encounters between civilizations to understand whether colonization can occur during the contact. By taking the case study of the Islamic and European civilizations' encounter with other civilizations, the study aims to broaden the historical domain of colonialism. The paper explores how European colonization (15th–19th Centuries) in regions like Egypt, the Americas, and India imposed governance structures, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure driven by nationalist ambitions, economic greed, ideological prowess and Enlightenment ideals of superiority. On the other hand, the Islamic expansions—7th–13th Centuries—and encounters in Al-Andalus, Persia, Byzantine, India, Central Asia and Byzantine fostered cultural pluralism and intellectual advancements through trade, scholarship, and religious coexistence, rooted in universalist ethos. By taking the colonization of Egypt as a case study, the paper examines how ideological, structural, and economic factors shaped these divergent outcomes, highlighting differing historical trajectories in terms of civilizational encounter. For a theoretical framework, the study employs Hagen Schulze's States, Nations and Nationalism and Toynbee's 'Challenge and Response' theory to enrich the inquiry.

Keywords: Islam, Europe, Civilizational Encounter, Colonization, Enlightenment, Modernity.

Introduction

For centuries, the encounter between civilizations across time and space played a pivotal role in shaping global political, social, cultural and intellectual

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landscapes. However, these encounters between civilizations occurred in various shapes and trails ranging from peaceful exchanges to violent conquests thereby leaving tragic legacies behind.¹ According to renowned British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, the ‘Encounter between Civilizations’ is one of the important aspects of history in general because it provides alternative ways to look at the history of the world. In Toynbee’s view, the term ‘encounter’ refers to an event when momentarily a stronger civilization comes into contact with a weaker civilization resulting in the exchange of some elements.² From the Eurocentric perspective, the ‘strong civilization’ aligns with the term ‘expansion’, commonly equated with colonial conquests, through which elements of its culture are imposed on weaker societies, either voluntarily or coercively.³ But there is a problem with Toynbee’s synthesis of ‘Civilizational Encounter’ because like St. Augustine and Hegel, he imagines world history as some kind of masterful and progressive execution of God’s plan, which shows his paradoxical attempt to provide empirical foundations for his meta-historical vision.⁴ Nonetheless, the term ‘encounter’ has been a key concept in civilizational history, encompassing the interplay of diverse domains such as politics, culture, trade, and society.

On the contrary, the ‘Encounter between Civilizations’ is certainly not a recent phenomenon rather it has been inherent to world history since the ancient times. However, these contacts eventually occurred in a different manner—while some encounters led to colonization characterized by domination, exploitation, and the imposition of power, others fostered mutual cultural enrichment, intellectual dialogue, and synthesis.⁵ For instance, the first historical encounter between the East and West occurred through the silk route, which connected Han China with the Rome Empire. The trade and cultural exchange between China in the East and Rome Empire in the West demonstrates mutual cultural enrichment.⁶ In contrast, the series of conquests of Alexander the Great (356- 323 B.C.) of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Indic world represents a process of ‘syncretism’ of cultures that fused the Hellenic civilization with Greek, Persian, Egyptian and Persian cultures. Besides, similar patterns of civilizational encounters persisted throughout the Middle Ages—early and late—leading up to modern times.⁷ This paper explores the contrasting trajectories of the ‘Encounter between Civilizations,” particularly by comparing the Islamic and European encounters with other civilizations.

The European encounters with other civilizations were primarily driven by nationalist ambitions, economic greed, and cultural domination, which resulted in the colonization of other civilizations through exploitation

and subjugation. In contrast, the Islamic encounter with other civilizations was based on the universalist religious principle, which resulted in intellectual exchange, culture synthesis and mutual co-existence. The main question of this paper is to analyze ‘How did nationalism drive European colonial encounters, compared to the universalist principles of Islamic interactions?’ With this premise, the paper aims to explore the complex interplay of power, ideology and cultural encounters to offer a grounded perspective to understand cross-civilizational dynamics and contemporary cultural discourses.

The paper is divided into four major parts. The first discusses the theoretical framework used to explain the dynamics of encounters between civilizations. The second part discusses European encounters with other civilizations, thereby exploring its ideological and cultural patterns and its imperialist contact with other civilizations around the world. The third part briefly discusses the encounter of Islamic civilization with other civilizations with a broader emphasis on its universalist principles that make its encounter distinctive compared to the European one. The last part focuses on the comparative analysis of European and Islamic encounters by taking the case study of the colonization of Egypt. It draws comparisons based on encounters between civilization in social, political, intellectual and cultural contexts.

Theoretical Framework: European Provincialization and Islamic Universalization

Historiography and historical studies require both a grounded methodology and a theoretical framework to interpret major events and analyze them correctly. Norman G. Lederman and Judith S. Lederman argue that theoretical framework plays a pivotal role both in qualitative and quantitative research because it provides the basis for framing the argument within the study. Since this study addresses the phenomenon of colonization during the encounter between two civilizations, thus, the study requires a well-grounded theoretical framework to frame the arguments and analysis. The term colonization refers to the process of exercising control and power over the conquered territories through massive restructuring in the social, political and economic sphere in order to align them with the exploitative interests of the colonizers.⁸ When it comes to the history of modern European civilization, colonization is inherent to its progress thesis. In contrast, the Islamic encounter with other civilizations during the Middle Ages—both during its initial rise and later during the Golden Age—remained more of mutual cultural and intellectual exchange rather than economic exploitation through colonization. A. Nuri Yurdusev in his study *Civilization or Naked Greed* argues

that the word civilization was unknown to Europe during the Middle Ages until its encounter with the Islamic World during the late Middle Ages, thereby challenging the claims of modern Western historians about the genesis of the term civilization with European roots, which means *Civitas* (city) in Latin.⁹

On the other hand, Yurdusev contends that similar connotations can be found in other languages such as in the word for civilization is '*Medeniyet*', which traces its root to Arab, that also refers to 'city'. Likewise, in Arabic there are two parallel terms to denote 'city', one is 'Medina' with inherent relation to *Medeniyet* and the other word is '*Umran*', coined by Ibn Haldun, which denotes 'to cultivate or to build up'. The diverse genealogy of the term civilization, therefore, clearly demonstrates that the modern Western concept of civilization has close parallels with colonization.¹⁰ In this context exploring the usage of the term civilization in the Western archives and encyclopedic sources would be useful.

The term civilization first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the eighteenth century, which was defined in three broader contexts. First, in the context of law mainly referring to the civil law, which refers to an act of justice or judgement in response to inquest—this sense of law came into legal practice after the conquest of the New World by the European powers during the 14th and 15th centuries. Second, the term civilization is defined as an act of civilizing or of being civilized. Thirdly, civilization is defined as the civilized condition of state or a modern developed state, this sense of civilization became widely popular after 1775 which marks the highest period of European colonization.¹¹

This demonstrates that the modern European civilization perceived itself to be superior by marginalizing and 'provincializing' the rest of the world through colonization. For the modern West, the world outside Europe is often portrayed as barbaric and uncivilized,¹² reflecting the Western attempts to alienate and dominate non-European civilizations. Perhaps, to develop Western domination of knowledge production, the Western historians justified the civilizing mission by calling it a 'divine mission' to modernize the people of colonized territories.¹³ According to Edward Said, the Western colonization was based on the ideals of the European Enlightenment and imperial objectives that promoted Euro-centric models of culture, governance and rationality, often advocated as universal standards for the colonies to follow.¹⁴ However, when it comes to the Islamic encounters with other civilizations, the encounter is primarily rooted in the concept of *Ummah* that

refers to the Qur'anic version of global community thereby transcending cultural boundaries by uniting people under shared ethical and religious frameworks.¹⁵ In this respect, to shape the theoretical framework, this study uses Hagen Schulze's *States, Nations and Nationalism* and Toynbee's 'Challenge and Response' theory to explore how the rise of nation state and nationalism in Europe triggered imperial and colonial ambition in contrast to Islam's universalist approach to other civilizations.

European Encounters: From the New World to the Colonization of Egypt

The European encounters with other civilizations, particularly after the 15th century, demonstrates a unique trend of the interaction ranging from the objectification of people they came in contact with, physical and cultural domination to a full-fledged colonization. For instance, with the beginning of the 15th century, the first colonial race among the major European powers began after the discovery (as a jargon) of the New World by the imperial Spain.¹⁶ This discovery marked the beginning of a new ideological, messianic, nationalistic, racial and cultural based colonization of the non-European races. Before the arrival of the White Europeans, the New World was home to three major ancient civilizations; Aztec, Inca and Maya, which evaporated over the course of a century after the Spanish conquest. As per the historical records, Maya and Inca were oldest and the most powerful, the pinnacle of their rule ranges from 250 to 900 CE.¹⁷ However, the Aztec with its dominating center in modern-day Mexico became the first colonial zone when the Spanish *Conquistador* Hernan Cortes arrived in 1519.¹⁸ Famous historian and archeologist, Irwin R. Blacker (1965), in his seminal work *Cortes and the Aztec Conquest* describes the first encounter of the Spanish colonizer with the Aztec civilization in the following words:

Then one morning, a great causeway appeared in the distance. Spreading before them was the broad avenue leading toward Moctezuma's capital. Years later, Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote: "We saw so many cities and villages built in the water and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway going toward Mexico, we were amazed. . . And some of our soldiers even asked whether the things that we saw were not a dream. [We were] seeing things. . . That had never been heard of or seen before, not even dreamed about."¹⁹

This quote from Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who was serving as commander of Conquistadors under Herman Cortes, clearly demonstrates the shock and awe of the invading force upon encountering the most advanced and well-designed city landscape of the Aztec Capital with its complex causeways and water-based cities.²⁰ Moreover, this also shows Aztec cities, like Tenochtitlan were certainly more advanced in terms of landscapes, designs, infrastructure and aesthetics compared to that of Spanish cities—thus the well-designed landscape of Aztec cities was a dream-like for the Spanish conquistadors.²¹ What is distinctive about the European encounter with the other civilization is that the encounter always processed with the Othering and objectification of the colonized people as was the case during the encounter with the New World.²² Moreover, the European encounter with non-European civilizations was primarily driven by the interplay of three major factors: ideological, nationalist and economic motives. For instance, in terms of ideology, European colonizers justified their expansion through the arrays of *Civilizing Mission*, which was rooted in cultural, racial and religious superiority over the non-European people—perhaps, the Europeans used this peculiar narrative to spread Christianity and Western values.²³ The New World became the first experimental laboratory of the European colonial method both in the ideological, cultural and religious spheres.²⁴ Similarly, when it comes to nationalist ambitions, the European powers such as the British Empire, French Empire, and Dutch Empire alongside Spain began expanding into the non-European territories claiming territories to enhance prestige and power.

Similarly, economically, one of the ulterior motives of European encounters with the other civilizations was the pursuit of wealth through resources, trade routes, slave trade, and resource exploitation that played a pivotal role in colonial expansion from the 16th to 19th centuries. However, in a broader framework, the European encounters with the other civilizations were not merely superficial but deeply structural. For instance, the colonization of Egypt as analyzed by Timothy Mitchel in his book '*Colonizing Egypt*' exemplifies European colonization as a deep structural process. According to Mitchell, British colonial rule in Egypt (1882–1956) was deeply structural in nature, which relied on disciplinary mechanisms such as surveillance, deep bureaucratic controls and land reforms that were aimed at reorganizing the Egyptian society for both socio-political and economic domination.²⁵ For instance, when it comes to the land reforms, the British colonial regime implemented cadastral surveys to restructure both land ownership, to collect taxes and to extract resources.²⁶ Moreover, for the social restructuring, the British administration introduced new English medium educational reforms to promote their ideological prowess over the Egyptian

society. Referring to the implementation of the educational reforms under the British colonial rule, Mitchell writes,

For many Europeans—military officers, Saint-Simonist engineers, educationalists, physicians, and others—a place like nineteenth-century Cairo provided the opportunity to help establish a modern state based on the new methods of disciplinary power. [...] The same principle of order was manifested in the rebuilding of Cairo and other Egyptian towns and villages to create a system of regular, open streets, in the supervision of hygiene and public health, and above all in the introduction of compulsory schooling. The new schooling, discussed in chapter three, was to produce several effects. It created a new hierarchy of knowledge, making the power of the state both more extensive and more intimate in its hold over the lives of every villager. Schooling was also to create the individual citizen, the productive and subjected body whose disciplined habits of work, consumption, and political life were to form the units of the new state's power.²⁷

This excerpt demonstrates the role played by the compulsory schooling during the British colonial administration and the major purpose of this compulsory schooling to create a disciplined, educated, urbanized and individualized citizenry to support the development of the modern state in Egypt. Moreover, the excerpt also exemplifies the British educational reform implementation that paved the way for the expansion of structural-oriented colonial domination. Moreover, the structural aspects of the British colonial rule were not limited to the educational reforms; rather the reforms also involved various spheres ranging from urban planning to healthcare initiatives. For instance, in case of urban planning, the British colonial administration invested in the development of major urban industrial centers to attract cheap labor from the rural centers to boost the productivity and resources extraction.²⁸ Referring to the urban and industrial planning of the colonial administration, Mitchell²⁹ writes,

By the eve of the First World War, cotton was to account for more than ninety-two percent of the total value of Egypt's exports. The changes associated with this growth and concentration in exports included an enormous growth in imports, principally of textile products and food, the extension throughout the country of a network of roads,

telegraphs, police stations, railways, ports and permanent irrigation canals, a new relationship to the land, which became a privately owned commodity concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful and increasingly wealthy social class, the influx of Europeans, seeking to make fortunes, find employment, transform agricultural production or impose colonial control, the building and rebuilding of towns and cities as centres of the new European-dominated commercial life, and the migration to these urban centres of tens of thousands of the increasingly impoverished rural poor. No other place in the world in the nineteenth century was transformed on a greater scale to serve the production of a single industry.³⁰

This excerpt demonstrates the economic motivations of the British colonial administration to extract resources from the Egypt through structural reforms at a broader scale, particularly through urban planning and development of cities. On the other hand, this structural exploitation under the European colonial yoke is not limited to Egypt because the British colonizers employed a similar structural reforms mechanism in India and colonial territories in Africa.³¹ Perhaps, this validates the central argument of this paper that colonialism remained a parallel phenomenon when it comes to the European encounters with the other civilizations. For the theoretical framework analysis, Hagen Schulze's *States, Nations and Nationalism* provides a detail account of how the imperial ambitions and nationalist supremacy contributed to the European colonial expansion, which was disguised in civilizing mission and enlightenment ideals. Perhaps, the civilizing mission was used as a genuine tool for justifying the economic exploitation and suppression of the colonial territories. For in chapter IV of the book entitled *The Imperialist Nation State, 1871–1914*, Schulze (1996) writes,

The Greater Britain movement sought to present the British Empire as a cohesive entity bound by shared language, culture, and loyalty to the Crown. It was a manifestation of imperialist nationalism, promoting the idea that Britain's global dominance was not only a matter of power but also of moral and civilizational superiority.³²

Here, Schulze describes the Greater Britain Movement with a structurally grounded imperialist phase, during which British Empire was seen as source of the nationalist pride. According Schulze, this movement was

championed by the British public figures and intelligentsia including the famous British historian John Robert Seeley (1834-1895), who argued about the importance of Federative empire to strengthen the British imperial standing at the global stage—perhaps, this demonstrates how the British national identity played a pivotal role in the imperial expansion, which was the extension of British values.³³ Moreover, by the end of the 19th century, the British Empire spanned from the shores of pacific ocean, Indian ocean up to the shore of South Africa and according to Schulze within Britain, this was perceived as a source of national pride³⁴. In this respect, if we historically analyse the European encounter with the other civilizations from the New World, India, China and Egypt, there is a vivid similarity in terms of colonial patterns including structural oppression and bureaucratic governance³⁵—in particular, the British colonial history is perfect manifestation of the European encounters with other civilizations.

Islamic Encounters: Universalism and cross-Cultural Unity

The Islamic encounter with other civilizations mainly occurred during the early (7th-13th CE) expansion Islam out of Arabia carries a unique historical character in terms of its contacts with other civilization both within the surrounding regions of Arabia and beyond.³⁶ The sole purpose of Islamic encounter with other civilization was based on the absolute truth (universalism) and providing a new worldview to other people both Arabs and non-Arabs about the understanding the world.³⁷ From the Islamic historical standpoint, the concept of the Western modernity is a relative terminology invented by Europeans to construct the history of their rise. However, for Muslims, the modernity began with the rise of Islam in Arabia during the early 7th century, which emerged not just as universal theological worldview rather a pure political, social, economic and civilizational system. Medina, which became the epicenter of the rise of Islam was the first modern state with a unique socio-political, legal and economic structure.³⁸ Alas, following the Renaissance in Europe, the ascendance of the West led to the term ‘modernity’ being superficially conflated with Western historical development. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that, between the 15th and 19th centuries, the term ‘modernity’ was appropriately employed to signify the ascendance of Western civilization—because Europe was facing socio-political chaos during this particular period. However, during this period, some historical archives display the beginning of Modernity with the rise of Islam in Arabia.³⁹ One such book which appeared during first half of the 18th Century, associates the beginning of Modernity with the rise of Islam. The first chapter of the book

entitled “The Life of Muhammed” describes the prophet of Islam in the following way,

No Person celebrated in history has, perhaps, been celebrated in more different lights than Mohammed, the legislator of the Arabs, and the founder of the Moslem characters power. Some Christian writers have represented him as an odious impostor, contemptible for his defects both of body and mind, and a man of the most defoliate morals. Others, on the contrary, have not scrupled to pronounce him one of the writers most eminent legislators that ever appeared in the world, adorned with the finest intellectual endowments, rendered more amiable still by the practice of every social virtue, and equally famous for his vast capacity, and the excellency of his institutions. Nay, some of these, on whom the principles both of natural and revealed religion seem to have fat easy enough, more than insinuate, that, as he transfused into the Korän all the essentials, without any of the corruptions, of Christianity, his religious system seems at least as worthy of God as that of the Gospel, if he was not the last great prophet sent to perfect even the dispensation of Jesus himself.⁴⁰

This sort of description of the prophet of Islam from the European historians of the 18th Century clearly demonstrates the universalist foundations of the Islamic civilization. Nonetheless, from the historiographical lens, the Islamic encounters with other civilization during the early phases (7th-13th Century CE) ranging from Persia, Egypt to Andalusia, Spain demonstrates a unique feature. There are two major characteristics of the Islamic encounter with the other civilization that makes it distinctive compared to European encounters, which resulted in the full-grown colonialism.⁴¹ First, in the cultural sphere, the Islamic encounters with other civilizations employed a unique strategy instead of destroying the local cultures, the Muslim ruler allowed the conquered territories to retain their culture and norms. However, this was not certainly the case in the European encounter, which attempted to forcefully impose the Western ideals and culture upon the native people through a structural onslaught.⁴² Cathrine Nixey (2018) in her recent book briefly discusses how the rise of Christianity was tumultuous and destructive to Hellenic and Roman civilization. According to Nixey, although majority of the modern historians in the West consider the arrival of Christianity into the Roman and Hellenic world as

“triumph”, however, they certainly ignored the fact that this victory entailed a destructive process, in which the follower of Christ suppressed the classical culture thereby descending the Western civilization into severe decline for centuries.⁴³ On the contrary, the expansion of Islam during the early phases differed when it comes to its encounter with non-Arab civilization, i.e. Persia, which retained its historical heritage even after its conquest by the Muslims in 634 BCE.

Second, another important characteristic of the Islamic encounter with the other civilizations is the intellectual exchange particularly during the time of Umayyad and Abbasid caliphate. With the gradual expansion of Islamic Caliphate into domain of ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Persia, Byzantine and India, Muslim encountered sophisticated intellectual traditions including Persian literature, Egyptian astronomy, Indian Mathematics and most importantly Greek philosophy.⁴⁴ During the same period, Europe was under the yoke of poverty, extreme illiteracy and feudal rule—as Hodgson, European were unaware about the Hellenic and Roman culture. Unlike the Europeans, the Muslim rulers and scholars did not suppressed these tradition rather intellectually engaged with them, which occurred through the promotion of the culture of translation and synthesis.⁴⁵ It is a well-documented historical fact that early Muslims played a pivotal role in the development of the culture of translation and transliteration, driven by their profound pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.⁴⁶ For instance, the establishment of the Academy of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma) by Abbasids became the intellectual epicenter philosophical scholarship, where scholars like Al-Kindi, and Ibn Sina (known in the West as Avicenna)⁴⁷ translated and commented on Greek texts by Aristotle and Plato, integrating them with Islamic theology and philosophy.⁴⁸ Likewise, within the political and administrative spheres, the Muslim rulers enriched the domain of governance by adopting several practices from Persia.⁴⁹ This demonstrates the universalist feature of the Islamic encounter with other civilizations. Marshall Hodgson (1993) in his seminal work “Rethinking World History” describes the Islamic civilizations and its encounter with other civilizations in the following way:

Islamic civilization must be understood not as an isolated phenomenon but as a central component of the Oikoumenic zone, bridging the Nile-to-Oxus region with India and China. The Islamicate cultural complex—encompassing not just Muslims but also non-Muslims under Islamic rule—facilitated a vast intellectual exchange. For example, the translation of Greek texts into Arabic in Baghdad’s House of

Wisdom, and their subsequent transmission to Europe via Al-Andalus, was a pivotal moment in world intellectual history.....There is but one history—global history—and all partial or privileged accounts must be resituated in a world historical context. The intellectual achievements of Islamic civilization, such as the preservation and enhancement of Greek philosophy or the development of algebra, cannot be understood in isolation. They were part of a broader dialogue across the Oikoumenic zone, where ideas flowed from India to Persia to Baghdad and eventually to Cordoba and Paris.⁵⁰

Hodgson's description about the intellectual heritage of Islamic Civilization demonstrates cultural diversity and universalist characteristics of Islam, which basis its foundational principles on the teachings of prophet hood. According to Hodgson, at the Academy of Wisdom, the Islamic scholars and intellectuals like Al-Biruni,⁵¹ Ibn-Sina and Al-Khwarizmi⁵² etc. played a pivotal role in converging the Greek, and Persian knowledge with the Islamic intellectual heritage.⁵³ Perhaps, the intellectuals and scholars at the Academy of Wisdom contributed in one way or another to all modern spheres of knowledge ranging from natural sciences (biology, mathematics, chemistry, physics, astronomy), to social sciences (history, sociology, Ethics, Law, Politics, Economics), which validates the intellectual character of Islamic Civilization. Moreover, it was the universalist ethos of the Islamic Caliphates which viewed diverse peoples as part of a broader community (ummah) united by faith rather than ethnicity or territory.⁵⁴ Hagen Schulzes in his briefly discusses, how faith became secondary rather tertiary during the European encounter with the other civilizations—the primary focus of the European empire was on territorial gains, economic exploitation and cultural homogeneity with an aim of imposing their cultural ideals. On the other hand, the Islamic encounter with other civilizations occurred by adopting a unique universalist ethos instead pursuing colonization and suppression of the local cultures.

Islam vs. European Encounters with Reference to Colonialism

The Western and Islamic encounters with other civilizations throughout the course of history show a varied and distinctive character particularly when it comes to their contact with other societies/communities in the social, political, cultural, intellectual and economic spheres.⁵⁵ For the comparative analysis of Islamic and European encounters with other civilization, I use “Challenge and Response” theory of Arnold J. Toynbee, which states that

civilization often develop and transform through their response to external stimuli. The Challenge and Response theory⁵⁶ allow us to understand how the civilizational encounters in the socio-cultural and intellectual shaped the historical trajectories of the civilizations.⁵⁷ When it comes to the Islamic encounter, since its emergence in the 7th century encountered various civilization ranging from Byzantine, Sassanid Persia to nomadic societies in Central Asia and Hindu-Buddhist societies in Asia. The encounter of Islam with these diverse array of culture was unique in character due to its remarkable capacity for synthesis, which is rooted in the universalist ethos. According to Hodgson (1974), the universalist dimension of Islam is because Sharia was accepted as the universal moral law. In the introductory section of the Volume I of “Ventures of Islam”, Hodgson writes,

Muslims are assured in the Qur’an, ‘You have become the best community ever raised up for mankind, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, and having faith in God’ (III, 110). Earnest men have taken this prophecy seriously to the point of trying to mould the history of the whole world in accordance with it. Soon after the founding of the faith, Muslims succeeded in building a new form of society, which in time carried with it its own distinctive institutions, its art and literature, its science and scholarship, its political and social forms, as well as its cult and creed, all bearing an unmistakable Islamic impress. In the course of centuries, this new society spread over widely diverse climes, throughout most of the Old World. It came closer than any had ever come to uniting all mankind under its ideals.⁵⁸

The latter excerpts from the Hodgson seminal work clearly demonstrates how Muslim ruler upheld the Qur’anic teachings and Prophet hood during the encounters with the other civilizations. Hodgson’s reference to “*uniting all mankind under its ideals*” represents the prophetic concept of Ummah (One community) rooted in Islamic notion of justice, enlightenment and Shariah based moral order. In Toynbee context, despite various challenges including a grounded difference in cultural practices, language, traditions, morality, and rituals, the Islamic response during the encounter with other civilization remained resilient and proactive due to its universalist dimensions.⁵⁹ Unlike the European civilization of both late Medieval and early modern era, which was structurally based on Feudalism, Islamic civilization was unique due to its development of advanced urban zones that played a pivotal role in promoting cosmopolitanism and diversity subsequently. In

addition, alongside the development of urban centers, the governance system of Islamic Caliphates was also distinctive particularly when it comes to the treatment of minorities.⁶⁰ Unlike, European colonial rule, the Islamic Caliphates developed a unique governance policy known as *dhimmi system*⁶¹, which ensures the rights and protection of non-Muslims (Christian, Jews) residing within the territory of Islam. According to Bernard Lewis, due to the challenges of governing diverse populations within the territory of Caliphate, Islamic rulers responded through *dhimmi system*, which allowed religious minorities to maintain their faiths under Islamic rule, fostering coexistence while asserting political supremacy.⁶² However, these response to the governing challenges were not without tension—since the resistance persisted on various levels— but the Islamic civilization’s ability to adapt and integrate external elements strengthened its resilience and longevity.⁶³ This demonstrates the uniqueness of Islamic encounters with the diverse array of societies from the shore of Pacific, Indian Ocean to steppes of Central Asia and Islands of Asia pacific, which reflects the absence of colonial ventures.

On the contrary, the European encounters with other civilization both within Europe and beyond shows a different historical trajectory. From the Age of Exploration onwards, the European encounters with the other civilizations was marked by the drive for domination and colonialism. For instance, the European response during the encounter with the African societies and the civilizations in the “New World” during the 15th-18th centuries was primarily driven by the Mercantile ambitions, nationalist sentiments and eschatological worldview.⁶⁴ In Africa, the European colonial regime was shaped by the resource exploitation and slave trade towards the Atlantic world.⁶⁵ Likewise, in case of the New World, the Spanish policy towards the indigenous people of the New World was based on the forced conversion to Christianity and mercantilist exploitation.⁶⁶ John H. Elliott (2007) in his seminal work “*Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*” contends that the Spanish conquest of the civilizations of the New World was not limited military subjugation but also the imposition of the Christian faith in the form of *encomienda system* and missionary activities.⁶⁷ While mentioning the *encomienda system*, Eliot writes;

In the middle years of the sixteenth century, when vast new reserves of labour were needed for working the newly discovered silver deposits, the sharp fall in the size of the indigenous population was already beginning to undermine the foundations of the *encomienda system*. In the eyes of the colonial authorities silver production came to take precedence

over all other requirements, including those of the *encomenderos*.⁶⁸

Here, Elliott's mention of *encomienda* system contrasts with Bernard Lewis (1984) mention of *Dhimma* system, which the Muslim empires used to protect the rights and liberties of the non-Muslim minorities. According to Bayly (1989) European encounters with India and China in Asia was shaped by a unique trajectory—the encounter initially began with trade relations but with the passage of time, this trend shifted toward territorial control, as evidenced by the British East India Company's dominance in India.⁶⁹ This aspect certainly explains the European response was less about cultural synthesis and more about establishing hierarchies of power, with Enlightenment ideas of progress justifying colonization. Moreover, the European colonial regimes prioritized the domination over mutual exchange, that led to the marginalization of non-European cultures and the imposition of Western frameworks under the guise of universal advancement.⁷⁰ According to Hodgson (1974), the difference between the Islamic and European encounters with the other civilizations of the world can be traced to worldviews and internal structures—in the case of Islam, the encounter was intellectual exchange and cultural hybridity due to decentralized, pluralistic structure, unified by a shared religious-legal framework, allowed for flexible responses to external challenges.⁷¹ On the other hand, the European encounters, which were primarily driven by colonial objectives such as cultural subjugation, national pride and economic exploitation. Although, both Islam and Europe experienced various internal challenges during their encounters with other civilizations.⁷² For instance, Islamic societies grappled with balancing orthodoxy and syncretism, as seen in debates over Greek philosophy's compatibility with Islam. While, Europeans faced moral and intellectual crises, particularly during the Enlightenment, when encounters with non-European cultures prompted debates over universality of human realm. In this respect, the historical trajectories of the European and Islamic encounters with the other civilizations differs both in terms of approach, ideology, intention and worldview.

Conclusion

European and Islamic encounters with other civilizations beyond their dominions produced starkly different outcomes: The European encounter with other civilizations resulted in colonialism and the Islamic encounter with other civilizations ranging from Byzantine, Persia, India, and Egypt was primarily marked by the intellectual and cultural exchange. Moreover, the

studies have shown, the primary driver of the Islamic encounter with the other civilization was based on universalist worldview and cultural synthesis, while, the European encounter with other civilization was primarily driven by nationalist ambitions and economic exploitation. These differences reflect contrasting ideologies—nationalism versus universalism—and structural factors, such as centralized versus decentralized governance. By examining texts like *Colonizing Egypt*, *Western Culture in Eastern Lands*, and *States, Nations and Nationalism*, alongside *The Venture of Islam* and other seminal works on both civilizations, the study reveals that power, ideology, and economics played a central role during the encounters between civilizations throughout history. However, in case of Islamic encounter, the historical trajectories demonstrate a unique turn of events—for instead of subjugation, the Muslim ruler preferred a more balanced approach to accommodate different communities ranging from intellectual exchange to cultural assimilation—this certainly remained absent during the European encounters.

Notes

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- ¹ For more see Johann P. Arnason, “Understanding Inter-civilizational Encounters,” *Thesis Eleven* 86, no. 1 (August 2006): 39–53.
 - ² See Arnold J. Toynbee, “Encounters between Civilizations,” *Indian Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1958): 166–87, 166. Arnold Toynbee in his seminal work “*A Study of History*” traces the history of civilizations in four major stages: genesis, times of trouble, universal state and disintegration.
 - ³ See José da Mota-Lopes, “The Colonial Encounter and Its Legacy,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2017): 3–19 & Johann P. Arnason, “Civilizational Patterns and Civilizing Processes,” *International Sociology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 387–405.
 - ⁴ For more see John Wendon, “Christianity, History, and Mr. Toynbee,” *The Journal of Religion* 36, no. 3 (1956): 133–50.
 - ⁵ *Ibid.*, 3–19
 - ⁶ For more see Benjamin Nelson, “Civilizational Complexes and Intercivilizational Encounters,” *Sociological Analysis* 34, no. 2 (1973): 79–105. The encounter between civilization often occur in various domains ranging from cultural exchange, religious assimilation and social interaction.
 - ⁷ See Mădălina Strechie, “Alexander the Great and the ‘Clash’ of Ancient Civilizations,” in *International Conference Knowledge Based Organization* (New York: De Gruyter, 2018), 421–26, 422–25.

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- ⁸ See Herbert Lüthy, "Colonization and the Making of Mankind," *The Journal of Economic History* 21, no. 4 (1961): 483–95.
- ⁹ A. Nuri Yurdusev, "Civilization or Naked Greed," in *International Relations and the Philosophy of History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 56–73, 57. According to the author, the concept of civilization was unknown to the Europeans until the age of renaissance, when the dichotomy between the civilized and uncivilized emerged in socio-political literature.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57–59.
- ¹² See Andrea Stanton, review of *Islam in Global Politics: Conflict and Cross-Civilizational Bridging*, by Bassam Tibi, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 618–2, 618. According to Bassam Tibbi, the Western characterization of the term 'civilization' stems from the standpoint of polarity, in which Western civilization holds a universalized status, while the non-Western civilizations signify 'locality'.
- ¹³ Gerard Delanty, "The Making of a Post-western Europe: a Civilizational Analysis," *International Sociology* 72, no. 1 (2003): 9–25, 15. During the colonial period, the Westerners attempted to Europeanize the knowledge production in order to justify their colonial projects.
- ¹⁴ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 258.
- ¹⁵ For more see Abdullah al-Ahsan, "The Quranic Concept of Ummah," *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 7, no. 2 (1986): 606–16.
- ¹⁶ For detail see Peter Burke, "Did Europe Exist before 1700?" *History of European Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1980): 21–29. In this article, Burke traces the history of European civilization before the 1700s and states that
- ¹⁷ Aztec, Inca, Maya were three major civilization in the Americas composed of native Americans. The Aztecs ruled large areas of the modern-day Mexico in the 15th and 16th centuries. Likewise, Maya civilization though not centralized like Aztec and Inca ruled parts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador from 800 BC to 1500 AD. Incas were also native American people, which ruled a large part of Western South America from 1100 to 1500 AD. For more detail, see William T. Sanders and Geoffrey H. S. Bushnell, "Aztec Culture to the Time of the Spanish Conquest," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last updated October 11, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pre-Columbian-civilizations/Aztec-culture-to-the-time-of-the-Spanish-conquest>.
- ¹⁸ Lewis Hanke, "The Dawn of Conscience in America: Spanish Experiments and Experiences with Indians in the New World," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 2 (1963): 83–92.
- ¹⁹ For more see Irwin R. Blacker, *Cortés and the Aztec Conquest* (New York: New Word City, 2018), 40. In his seminal book, Becker highlights the strange experiences of the Spanish colonizers with the Aztec people, who were far more developed and modern than the Europeans. The book contains unique stories from the memoirs of Spanish soldiers, whose initial encounter with Aztecs was shock and awe.
- ²⁰ Stuart B. Schwartz, "Introduction: Civilizations in Conflict," in *Victors and Vanquished*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 164.
- ²¹ For more see Matthew Restall, "The Aztec Empire: A Surprise Ending?" *Historian*, no. 134 (Summer 2017): 12–17, 14. According to the author, in terms of architecture and structural landscape, the Aztec cities such as Tenochtitlán was a masterpiece.
- ²² See Douglas J. Falen, "Introduction: Facing the Other," *Anthropological Forum* 30, no. 4 (2020): 321–40 & Étienne Balibar, "Difference, Otherness, Exclusion," *Parallax* 11, no. 1 (2005): 19–34.
- ²³ For detail see José da Mota-Lopes, "The Colonial Encounter and Its Legacy," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2017): 3–19.
- ²⁴ Lewis Hanke, "The Dawn of Conscience in America: Spanish Experiments and Experiences with Indians in the New World," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 2 (1963): 83–92, 85.
- ²⁵ For detail see Charles Hirschkind, "'Egypt at the Exhibition': Reflections on the Optics of Colonialism: A Review of Timothy Mitchell's *Colonizing Egypt* (1988)," *Critique of*

- Anthropology 11, no. 3 (September 1991): 279–98, 283; Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 16.
- ²⁶ For more see Robert Home, “Scientific Survey and Land Settlement in British Colonialism, with Particular Reference to Land Tenure Reform in the Middle East 1920–50,” *Planning Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2006): 1–22.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20–27.
- ²⁸ See Katherine Jones, Jennifer Kopf, and Angela Martin, “The Represented and the ‘Real’: Economy, Postmodernity, and Post-Orientalist Research,” *Journal of Social Theory* 1 (1996): 87–104
- ²⁹ According to Mitchell, for the colonial exploitation, the British colonial administration needed new robust urban infrastructure with modern roads and telecommunications to boost the trade. For that purpose, the British colonial administration in Egypt began establishing new settlements to improve the communications, logistics, and mining operations.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ³¹ For detail see A. Adu Boahen, ed., *Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, vol. 2, *UNESCO General History of Africa* (San Francisco: University of California Press, 1990).
- ³² For more see, Hagen Schulze, “The Imperialist Nation State, 1871–1914,” in *States, Nations and Nationalism: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 231–264, 263.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 265.
- ³⁴ See Richard A. Voeltz, review of *States, Nations, and Nationalism: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, by Hagen Schulze, *History: Reviews of New Books* 25, no. 2 (1997): 72–73
- ³⁵ See V. G. Kiernan, “Europe in the Colonial Mirror,” *History of European Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1980): 39–61; Patrick O’Brien, “Imperialism and the Rise and Decline of the British Economy, 1688–1989,” *New Left Review* 1 (1999): 48–80.
- ³⁶ See Bernard Lewis, “On the Revolutions in Early Islam,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 32 (1970): 215–31
- ³⁷ For more, see Roziyah Sidik et al. “Interaction between Islamic and Other Civilizations,” in *Proceedings of ISICAS 2014* (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 2014), 281–95.
- ³⁸ See Masoumeh Banitalebi, Kamaruzaman Yusoff, and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, “The Impact of Islamic Civilization and Culture in Europe during the Crusades,” *World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization* 2, no. 3 (2012): 182–87.
- ³⁹ See Ahmad Ragab, “Making History: Identity, Progress and the Modern-Science Archive,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 21, no. 5 (2017): 433–44; also see Peter Burke, “Did Europe Exist before 1700?” *History of European Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1980): 21–29.
- ⁴⁰ George Sale, George Psalmanazar, Archibald Bower, George Shelvocke, John Campbell, John Swinton, and Tobias Smollett, *An Universal History from the Earliest Account of Time* (London: T. Osborne, 1747), 1–2.
- ⁴¹ For more see Johann P. Arnason, “Understanding Inter-civilizational Encounters,” *Thesis Eleven* 86, no. 1 (August 2006): 39–53.
- ⁴² Perhaps, a similar patterns can be seen during the early expansion of Christianity into the Hellenic and Roman World, whose cultural heritage vanished after the arrival of Christianity into these civilizations. Similarly, the European colonizers with the beginning of the 15th century employed the similar strategy during their encounter with the non-European civilizations. For further discussion see Catherine Nixey, *The Darkening Age: The Christian Destruction of the Classical World*, (London: Mariner Ltd, 2018), 10–23.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10–14
- ⁴⁴ For see Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 110–12.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ⁴⁶ See Hayrettin Yücesoy, “Translation as Self-Consciousness: Ancient Sciences, Antediluvian Wisdom, and the ‘Abbāsīd Translation Movement,” *Journal of World History* 20, no. 4 (2009): 523–57; Khalid Hussain Mir and Md. Rafique Anjum, “The Role of Translation in the Development of Scientific Knowledge in the Premodern Islamic World,” *MAQOLAT: Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 31–43

- ⁴⁷ Ibn Sina is considered as the founder of Modern Medicine—Kitāb al-shifā' and Al-Qānūn fi al-ṭibb are his grounded contribution.
- ⁴⁸ For more, see Ahmed Renima, Habib Tiliouine, and Richard J. Estes, "The Islamic Golden Age: A Story of the Triumph of the Islamic Civilization," in *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies*, 25–52 (Cham: Springer, 2016).
- ⁴⁹ For more see, Lauren Blaydes, Jeremy Grimmer, and Ryan McQueen, "Mirrors for Princes and Sultans: Advice on the Art of Governance in the Medieval Christian and Islamic Worlds," *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (2018): 1150–67.
- ⁵⁰ See Marshall Hodgson, *Rethinking World History* (Cambridge & London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 105.
- ⁵¹ Al Biruni is considered as the "Father of Comparative Religion", "Father of modern geodesy", Founder of Indology and the first anthropologist.
- ⁵² Al-Khwarizmi is considered as the founder and one of the major contributor to the development of modern mathematics, astronomy and Geography.
- ⁵³ See Johann P. Arnason, "Understanding Inter-civilizational Encounters," *Thesis Eleven* 86, no. 1 (August 2006): 39–53, 45.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 47
- ⁵⁵ See Erich Weede, "Islam and the West: How Likely Is a Clash of These Civilizations?" *International Review of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1998): 183–95
- ⁵⁶ The Challenge and Response theory was developed by Arnold J. Toynbee, a prominent British historian and philosopher. The theory posits that the rise, growth and fall of the civilizations does not occur through biological or environmental factors but through dynamic processes such internal chaos, social disruption or foreign invasions. For more see Shashi Suri, "Arnold Joseph Toynbee: Challenge and Response Theory as Reflected in 'A Study of History,'" *Sagacity: A Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 4, no. 1 (2025): 26–32; Michael A. G. Michaud, "Challenge, Response and SETI," *Acta Astronautica* 42, no. 10–12 (1998): 681–83.
- ⁵⁷ For detail see Ian Hall, "Challenge and Response: The Lasting Engagement of Arnold J. Toynbee and Martin Wight," *International Relations* 17, no. 3 (2003): 389–404.
- ⁵⁸ For more see Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Ventures of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago & New York: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 71. According to Hodgson, the Islamic encounter with other civilizations was unique in character, particularly due to the standardized application of Shari'a Law as a source of law to manage political affairs and authority.
- ⁵⁹ For detail see Arnold J. Toynbee, "Encounters between Civilizations," *Indian Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1958): 166–87, 179.
- ⁶⁰ See Sami Zubaida, "Max Weber's 'The City' and the Islamic City," *Max Weber Studies* 5, no. 2 (2005): 111–18.
- ⁶¹ Dhimmi System is a unique framework of the Islamic governance that ensures co-existence by granting specific rights and protection to the non-Muslims in return for paying Jizziya (Islamic Tax). Instead of forefull conversion (as was the case with Morrish Muslims, Jews during 15th century Spain) the Dhimma system ensures the rights, and liberties of non-Muslims residing within the territory of Islamic Caliphate—those who are benefiting from this pact are known as ahl al-dhimma (people of the pact). For more detail analysis Bernard Lewis, *Jews of Islam* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 20-21.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 20
- ⁶³ See Mohammad El-Sayed Selim, "Assessing Dialogues of Civilizations Between the Western and Muslim World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2009): 49–68.
- ⁶⁴ For more see Benjamin Nelson, "Civilizational Complexes and Intercivilizational Encounters," *Sociological Analysis* 34, no. 2 (1973): 79–105.
- ⁶⁵ See Robin Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (1997): 65–102; also see Babacar M'baye, "The Economic, Political, and Social Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa," *The European Legacy* 11, no. 6 (2006): 607–22. According to author, the Atlantic slave significantly affected the economic, political, and societal domain of the African continent, leading to a significant and lasting colonial legacy and history.

⁶⁶ See Katherine Jones, Jennifer Kopf, and Angela Martin, "The Represented and the 'Real': Economy, Postmodernity, and Post-Orientalist Research," *Journal of Social Theory* 1 (1996): 87–104.

⁶⁷ See John H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 98.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 98, para 2.

⁶⁹ For more see Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 20.

⁷⁰ See Conrad, Sebastian. 2012. "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique." *The American Historical Review* 117 (4): 999–1027.

⁷¹ For detail Marshall Hodgson, *Ventures of Islam: The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and New York: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 70-73. According to the Hodgson, the difference between the European and Islamic encounters with other civilizations can be attributed to their distinct worldviews and internal structures.

⁷² See Majid Fakhry and Sa'd al-Din al-Hamawi, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York and Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1987), 40-45.