

PART IV

Articulations

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11

ANTI-COLONIAL EMPIRES

Creation of Afro-Asian spaces of resistance

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Africa [is] the cradle of the world's systems and philosophies

(J.E. Casely Hayford 1911)

At first sight, contemporary Turkey and Ethiopia have very little in common. Turkey is a middle-income country with a strong industrial base and a developed state infrastructure. It has transformed from a recipient of aid to one of the largest donor countries: a “rising power” running a budget surplus with growth figures rivalling those of China. Ethiopia, on the other hand, has a legacy of violent conflict and secessions, mass poverty, hunger, and repeated droughts, and will likely remain dependent on external aid for years to come.

Despite this obvious divergence, there are plenty of commonalities, too. Both states, located at the peripheries of their respective continents, feature strong imperial legacies and histories of dominating those regions through their strategic locations. Having successfully defended their sovereignty against imperial designs, borders, identities and socio-political conditions were not directly imposed *qua* colonial fiat, making them cases of exception within Asia and Africa respectively (Tibebu 1996).¹ Agency, in other words, was not denied but sharpened defensively by an expanding Europe. Despite some dramatic territorial reconfigurations and social change “from above,” the two states of Turkey and Ethiopia demonstrate a certain level of continuity in statehood reaching from their imperial to modern formulations of rule.

Yet despite the success in defending their independence and eventually gaining internationally recognized sovereignty, these states continued to be subjected to the surrounding power inequalities in the international system. Having undergone crisis-ridden “special paths” throughout the twentieth century and the Cold War, both states, located at the geostrategically central locations of the Straits and the Horn of Africa, respectively, came to occupy key roles as major US allies in

otherwise highly volatile regions. Both now feature authoritarian developmentalist regimes gearing their economies towards greater integration into the world markets. Both see these ambitions tightly related to their (geo)political positions, overcoming periods of dependency and instability. Lastly, diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries themselves have steadily improved.

In contrast to those successful histories of resistance, literature on the postcolonial state usually focuses on the – continuing – experience of colonization. Anti-colonial struggles, the frequently violent process of winning political freedom from the imperial center, are thought to be half-successful at best. Multiple institutional colonial legacies and continued economic dependency mean that the vast majority of the world's polities are still subjected to structural power inequalities. A closer look at the conditions of postcoloniality reveals, indeed, that many struggles didn't so much generate independent states, but forms of neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1965). Being subjected to those international power imbalances, the postcolonial state is likely to reproduce the inequalities and the continued social contradictions "within," inspiring allegations reaching from "internal colonialism" (Hind 1984) to structurally "weak" or even "failed" states.²

Having escaped outright colonial control and following their own "special paths," anti-colonial, or defensive states pose not only a formidable geopolitical but also an ontological challenge to the West's "constitutive will to [exercise] power over the Orient" (Said 2003: 222) and associated assumptions about its lacking agency. Engaging the history of their making through successful resistance serves as a guide for a positive reconstruction, or a conceptual "way out" of Eurocentrism. This addresses a conventional criticism of postcolonial theory as ultimately not offering theoretical alternatives beyond a powerful critique (Matin 2013). Moving beyond the structurally over-determined "post-colonial" agency-less condition, emphasizing anti-colonial *geopolitical* resistance aims to bring non-Western agency "back in." It does so not necessarily through an abstract re-formulation of the ontological West/non-West divide, but through the concrete historicization of late imperial anti-colonial struggles. Those agents, it is argued, should therefore be seen not just as passive recipients or emulators of a "defensive modernity" but as constitutive parts of a world order into the present (Anievas and Nisancioglu 2015: 40).

Starting from this recognition, the related Turco-Ethiopian histories of resistance enable an alternative understanding of world politics, namely one whereby anti-Western geopolitical encounters change the conceptual understanding of non-European agents as passive. Successful acts of resistance, usually written out of the narrative of Western domination as "aberrations," are made constitutive, rather than exceptional, cases in world history. They not only demonstrate the potential of resistance. Their global repercussions, in the form of anti-colonial pan-Islamism and pan-Africanism, produce Afro-Asian *spaces of resistance* conceptually. This normative commitment to alternative conceptual spaces de-naturalizes the modern international order generated and dominated by the West. Indeed, this order has always faced resistance and is, as a result, itself shaped by this negation from its inception.

This chapter's emphasis on the Ottoman-Turkish and Ethiopian polities as locales of resistance also defies the false dichotomy between "state-centered" and "social" (or "from below") levels of analysis. Institutions of political rule set the parameters within which social interactions, including those resisting, take place. Commitments to move "beyond" state-centrism never quite escape the spatio-temporal institutional confines within which political rule is organized and social life takes place as a result. Institutional strategies of social reproduction shape and frame agential power, including those "from below." This does not deny inevitable power inequalities and relations of domination within state structures, but rather to show how these struggles are, for the time being, intimately related to the reproduction of state power. In the two cases discussed here, this has both domestic and international consequences as both historical centers of geopolitical resistance produce their own internal and external contradictions, leading to allegations from internal authoritarianism to quasi-imperial expansion. The related histories of successful Afro-Asian anti-colonial struggles and their global reverberations are, therefore, not without contradictions, notably in the form of internal, regional, and global power projections by successful anti-colonizers.

This chapter will proceed by briefly elaborating on the meaning of the present historicization of postcolonial theory before looking into the Ottoman-Turkish and Ethiopian experiences in greater detail. Here, I identify two key geopolitical encounters, the Battle of Adwa in 1896 and the Ottoman Gallipoli campaign of 1915, as historical moments of successful resistance with meaning far beyond their individual contexts. Both histories, thus far neglected by IR historical scholarship, are then contextualized within their global contexts, namely the anti-colonial pan-Islamism of the late Ottoman Empire and the pan-Africanism still embodied in the notion of "Ethiopianism." These geopolitical encounters, I argue, have helped to generate global imaginaries of resistance, inspirational to many anti- and de-colonial struggles across the world to this day. Re-historicizing these related anti-colonial struggles and their long-term consequences and contradictions, finally, also helps to illuminate a more complex picture of the postcolonial world, replacing structural West/non-West, North/South, Colonizer/Colonized binaries with concrete and related historicized agencies of the colonial and the colonized alike.

Postcolonialism and the state

One of the core contributions of postcolonial literature is to write non-Western agency, missing in the dominant Western and Euro-centric accounts, into the narrative of world politics. While this has frequently involved a self-denial of agency in light of the West's overwhelming coercive power and universalizing tendencies, more recent work has taken up this challenge. One of the answers was to doubt the "purely" Western European origins of capitalism (Anievas and Nisancioglu 2013; Hobson 2004), emphasizing the sources of social change coming from the "East" and/or "South." The principal means of "emancipating" the thus far unheard of and unaccounted for histories of the South and the East was then to

write them into the history of capitalist development. This was meant to address the “paradox of eastern agency” (Hobson 2014). John M. Hobson, in particular, argues that the multiple calls to re-invoke this agency were somewhat mistaken in trying to trace eastern agency as something emerging only as a result of the post-colonial struggle, having been previously “static.” Hobson demonstrates how it was there all along – just that it has been left invisible and that postcolonial scholarship was in some ways complicit in obscuring it.

Hobson and others try to overcome this invisibility by historicizing the “eastern” contributions to Western modernity. These attempts are historiographically rich and well founded. Critically, however, they do little to illuminate Eastern agency in its own right. Non-European history only acquires meaning by writing it into the history of capitalist modernity, which is said to be a global, rather than Western, phenomenon from the outset. In other words, the transition from object to subject, the seizing of agency by the disenfranchised is conditioned upon a contribution to capitalist development. While this is a welcome contribution to the study of capitalist modernity, it comes at the expense of looking into the social histories of the “East” and the “South” in their own right and the ways in which they generate geopolitical spaces outside of and beyond the West.

This chapter offers such a historicization of non-Western agency in its own right. It does so without writing out Eastern agency from world historical dynamics, shaped by capitalist modernity. Similarly, instead of understanding it as a “pristine” or purifying form of resistance, this chapter further problematizes the internal social contradictions that this “Eastern agency” has naturally developed as part of a broader world political dialectic of resistance.

Nineteenth-century resistance and anti-colonial empires

Apart from having successfully fought wars of independence, the Ottoman Empire and “Abyssinia” (as Ethiopia is also known) produced much of their wealth by occupying important geo-strategic locations. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, its central position on the Silk Route and at the crossroads between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea is mirrored by Turkey’s contemporary role as an energy transfer hub. Ethiopia’s position at the Horn of Africa allowed control of the profitable Red Sea trade, including coffee, gold and slaves (Aregay 1988). With the opening of the Suez Canal this has been replaced by energy. While those geostrategically important positions strengthened both empires, these also made them vulnerable to geopolitical designs by outside powers, especially during European expansions. Reform and modernization processes reacting to those pressures were faced with various internal contradictions. Military and bureaucratic state classes not only had to deal with the vestiges of traditional society but also with issues of social and ethnic diversity. Maintaining control in the peripheries became particularly challenging. Military success over the would-be European colonizers earned them important international recognition (then as now the benchmark for sovereignty). However, this also engendered controversial regional geopolitical ambitions:

Ethiopia's expansions in Somalia and Eritrea continue to fuel allegations of regional imperialism, whereas "Ottoman imperialism" (Emrence 2011) is mirrored by Turkey's contemporary intention to create a "new Middle East" (Balcı and Yeşiltaş 2006).

The sick man's success: Ottoman reincarnation at Gallipoli

While the Ottoman Empire evolved from an expansionist "Tyrant" to a "Sick Man" in the West's perception during the nineteenth century (Çırakman 2002), Turkey itself is frequently described as a "bridge" country (Yarık 2009), not least in the light of its EU accession aspirations. As a result, Turkey's position between "East" and "West" has received much academic and policy attention, which stands in contrast to its less reflected position between the "North" and the "South" (Deringil 2003). This relation, especially to its "Eastern" (but not so much its "Southern") neighbors has only recently attracted more interest insofar as it might signal a shift away from the "West" (Oğuzlu 2008). Frequently overlooked by postcolonial analysis (Göçek 2014), rather than being historicized with all its contradictions, Europe's relation with Ottoman/Turkish rule is either simplified as a "mirror image" (Müftüler-Bac 2000) or its Western orientation is taken for granted.³

Pan-Islamism

After expansion peaked in 1683, Ottoman rule entered a process of territorial decline. Its dual legitimacy from control of Mekka and Medina (Caliphate) and Istanbul/Constantinople (Eastern Roman Imperial successor state) suffered accordingly. Challenged by uprisings in its Christian majority peripheries combined with mainly Russian advances, Ottoman defensive modernization eventually merged with a political revival of pan-Islamism and a more one-sided emphasis on the Caliphate under Abdulhamid II (Karpas 2001). The First World War was subsequently fought as "jihad" by Sultanical decree, internationalizing the struggle against the Entente. This was particularly successful in British India (Özcan 1997) and Tanzania, leading to financial contributions and rhetorical admiration of the last Muslim state upholding the institution of the Caliphate while resisting Western occupation. Though many Indian Muslims also remained loyal to the Crown, it is clear that the resistance against the designs to divide the Empire and the Allied Occupation of Istanbul was observed with remarkable sympathies.

India's anti-colonial Muslims organized in the Khalifat Organization agitated in favor of preserving the Caliphate under Ottoman-Turkish rule. Ostensibly acting out of concern for the unity of the global *ulema*, its underlying purpose was to rally a pan-Indian Muslim constituency, without, however, intending to divide and ethnically separate India. Its core aim was adequate representation within congress – a bid supported by Gandhi and other Hindu leaders fully aware of British divide-and-rule policies intent on preserving national unity. Despite divisions within the Muslim constituency, the Ottoman struggle helped to induce a pan-Indian

movement of solidarity, which, however, failed to attract movements beyond the subcontinent. Arab Muslims had entered the war on the side of the Western colonial powers, clearly perceiving Ottoman centralization as the greater “imperial” threat (Makdisi 2002).

Within this struggle roiled another. Struggle over control of the strategically important Dardanelles stands out for its symbolic value. Allied forces, mostly Australian and New Zealand contingents (or ANZAC) led by British commanders, fought an unsuccessful battle at the slopes of Gallipoli in 1915. The Ottoman army defeating a Western colonial force, the largest Empire on earth at the time, became a defining moment in the anti-Western struggle. The Caliphate had successfully defended not only its right to control one of the most important shipping passages but also its status as an independent actor in world politics. Beyond resisting its own domination, the Ottoman Empire also maintained its Muslim agency at a time of all-out inter-imperial warfare. The Ottoman’s military effectiveness and motivation surprised the British high command, operating (much like Italy in Ethiopia) under an assumption of superiority and the related “backwardness” of enemy forces. Postcolonial studies of Gallipoli tend to focus on the relation between the British Empire and the colonial people dying on its behalf (Tranter and Donoghue 2007) while Turkish Republican historiography has long neglected Gallipoli along with its role in the First World War as part of an Ottoman heritage that was only recently reluctantly engaged (Turan 2014).

Despite being appalled by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s secularism, his successful anti-colonial campaign during Turkey’s War of Independence (1919–1923) was seen by Indian Muslims and others⁴ as a logical continuation of the anti-Western struggle, making Atatürk the “ill lodged soul of the East still in search of a body” (Mishra 2012: 284). At a time when Britain and France still directly controlled the Middle East, maintaining the Caliphate one year into the Turkish Republic’s laicist existence also maintained global Muslim support. Yet a Turkish “civilizing mission” both at home (Esenbel 1994) and abroad (Deringil 2003) increasingly compromised the already doubt-laden anti-imperialist credentials. During the republican period, Atatürk evoked civilizational themes, elevating the nationalist Turkish founding mythology of the “Hittites” to a “Central Asian” civilization relevant to the history of humankind as a whole. Such “Turkic” ethnic nationalism saw the forceful production of a homogeneous demographic around the Sunni Muslim majority leading to campaigns of ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and the oppression of minority populations to this day.

In sum, the late Empire and early Republic feature anti-colonial rhetoric and policies born out of a resistance against imperial territorial designs. This position contributed to (though it did not entirely cause) strong resentments against liberal-imperial powers as well as friendly relations with other “contender” states, including Germany (both before and after 1933), and the early Soviet Union. Realities of the postwar order and a continued self-identification as a European power brought Turkey back into the fold of those previously “unfriendly” powers.

Cold War dynamics such as Stalin’s territorial designs on Turkey and the Korean War finally put an end to “contender state” aspirations and locked the Republic

into a transatlantic future. This gradual entry into the Western hemisphere came at the expense of Turkey's anti-colonial credentials. Consciously and actively dissociating itself from its anti-colonial heritage, Turkey left Bandung publicly declaring the futility of anti-Western positions. Its pro-Israeli stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict damaged relations with many postcolonial nations that had previously supported and admired Turkey, further damaging already poor relations with most of the Arab world,⁵ many of which were also members of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). Turkey's role in the Cyprus crisis with its invasion and occupation in 1974 of a leading NAM country consolidated this split with the postcolonial world. Many postcolonial leaders were now clearly, if not entirely accurately, identifying Turkey with Western Imperialism.⁶ The Cyprus invasion aside, Turkey's geopolitical role remained isolated, fortifying the second largest army within NATO against the dual threats of a Soviet invasion and continued regional instability. This has only recently been revised under the leadership of the Justice and Development (AK) Party, in power since 2002, showing a greater taste for regionally pro-active, if highly contentious, foreign policies.⁷

Ethiopia's dream

Like the Ottoman-Turkish state, Ethiopia's transformation is related to, but not determined by Western expansion. Once under the dual pressure from the Mahdist movement of Sudan (itself anti-colonial, fighting the Anglo-Egyptian condominium controlling Sudan at the time) and Italy's advances on the Red Sea coastline, a process of fiscal and military centralization similar to that of the Ottoman Empire, generated an uneasy alliance between a quasi-Absolutist imperial court and local landlords. Italy's designs on Abyssinia (as it was called in its colonial dictionary with reference to its biblical significance) were in turn determined by its experience as a latecomer. The Risorgimento and the subsequent rise of fascism resulted in an aggressive late entry in the Scramble for Africa, determining a taste for restoring its Roman imperial heritage.

Those imperial references fueled Italian expansionism with a false sense of superiority. Yet determined Ethiopian forces under Emperor Menelik twice stopped the Italian advance. First, in the highly symbolic battle of Adwa in 1896, a sense of superiority (much like the British in Gallipoli in 1915) obscured sound analysis of the well-equipped, trained, and effective Ethiopian troops. Victory at Adwa reminded the whole of Africa and the world that European expansion wasn't unstoppable. Apart from this global symbolic power (Milkias and Metaferia 2005), this event also earned Ethiopia the status of one of the first non-Western recognized sovereign states (Clapham 2002), capable of conducting its independent arms purchases.⁸ Mussolini's revanchist invasion in 1935–1936 and the deployment of mustard gas earned the Ethiopian struggle further sympathies and inflated its symbolic value for a process of decolonization now already in full swing.

Though it fueled Ethiopia's international recognition as an anti-colonial power, the Italian invasion paradoxically also deepened internal contradictions. Eritrean

and Somali forces had joined the Italian invaders due to grievances with the imperial court: the former had enjoyed lower taxes under Italian occupation, generating discontent upon the re-introduction of the Ethiopian centralized taxation system. Much of the Somali and Omoro population clashed with the developmental ambitions of a modernizing Empire. Their pre-capitalist semi-pastoralist subsistence economies came under attack by ambitions to expand irrigated agriculture and to recruit a labor force for a “civilizational” mission, exploiting the fertile, water-rich highlands for cultivating high-value crops, especially coffee.⁹ A simplistic understanding of Ethiopia’s internal contradictions would focus on the dominance of Christian subsistence farming over Muslim pastoralists, though ethnic and religious differences are much more complex and frequently only the surface expression of deeper socio-economic struggles. As a result, Omoro, Somalis, and others living under the “Yoke of Abyssinia” earn for Ethiopian imperial power the reputation of being just as oppressive as white colonialism (Jalata 2010). As with the Armenian, Kurdish, and Alevi questions in Turkey, these continued conflicting lines demonstrate that every process and project of emancipation is likely to generate its own internal and external contradictions.

Pan-Africanism

Those internal contradictions stand in stark contrast to Ethiopia’s leading symbolic and political role in the pan-African movement, collectivizing the Ethiopian experience. The movement’s philosophical foundations reach from romantic primitivism (accepting European charges of backwardness) to romantic gloriana (pointing out Africa’s “civilizational” achievements) born of dream (poetry) and nightmare (imperialism) alike (Mazrui 1995). Ethiopian sources of pan-Africanism are similarly based on the “greatness of ancient Ethiopia” as a Christian heritage, the birthplace of the Queen of Sheba, the “cradle of civilization” and similar references (Geiss 1974: 133; Casely Hayford 1911; Lynch 1967: 250). After Adwa, the term “Ethiopia” not only acquires a meaning synonymous with “Black” Africa, based on Psalm 68:32: “Princes shall come out of Egypt – Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” “Ethiopianism” also developed as a political movement. Afro-American communities especially adopted this quasi-religion of “Ethiopianism” (Moses 1975; Shepperson 1953). The Haytian Emigration Society, for example, intended to build Haiti as the American pillar of the “Ethiopian Empire” (Geiss 1974: 133). Leading Pan-Africanists like W.E.B. DuBois frequently mixed the idea of Ethiopia with the institution of the Imperial court itself that he labelled “The Star of Ethiopia” (Dubois [1915] 1983). Marcus Garvey observed the contradictory realities in Ethiopia (or Abyssinia) and Haile Selassie’s policies in particular, calling him a “failure of an Emperor who (famously) surrendered himself to the white wolves of Europe” (Garvey [1937] 1990: 739). “Ethiopia” and “Ethiopianism” kept their symbolic meanings, at times even portraying all black men as “Ethiopian.” Though the conceptual uptake and its territorial referent were sometimes far removed from one another, Adwa certainly retained a strong symbolic power.

Ethiopianism and Ethiopia proper became associated with one another more closely again with the atrocities committed during Mussolini's invasion (Weisbord 1972). It was this second Italo-Abyssinian war that helped to consolidate an otherwise diverse and split pan-African movement leading to the foundation of the International African Friends of Abyssinia.

Today, Ethiopia headquarters the African Union, symbolizing both the ideational heritage of its struggle for Africanism and its contemporary influence over African politics in general. Beyond Africa itself, Ethiopia remains a key reference to many anti-colonial movements as well as the black rights movement in the Americas (Scott 1993).¹⁰ As Garvey ([1937] 1990) had pointed out, it comes with a romanticization of Ethiopian internal politics overlooking multiple social contradictions and power inequalities, such as the current dominance of Ethiopian politics by the Tigray tribe despite a federal constitution and formal parliamentary democracy. None of the much longer-term historical references to Ethiopian greatness as a symbol of defying the West would be imaginable, however, without the more recent, early modern geopolitical encounter and repeated successful repulsion of a European imperial power.

Conclusion

Unlike Turkey, Ethiopia retained its anti-colonial credentials. While both contemporary states pursued aggressive growth strategies under authoritarian neo-liberal developmentalist regimes, Ethiopia is committed to a zero-carbon growth focusing on renewable energy production, whereas Turkey's focus on emissions-heavy construction and coal-fired energy production leads to accusations of being environmentally unsustainable. Both look for economic expansion in neighboring markets and project their power regionally wherever possible to secure those markets. At the same time, despite many diverging interests, both remain close allies of the US at geopolitically sensitive locations.

This short comparative history of anti-colonial empires and the spaces of resistance they create has demonstrated, first, that these anti-colonial histories are still relevant in contemporary world politics. Despite their formal alliances with the West, Turkey and Ethiopia maintain relatively high levels of independence, regional influence and stability within environments plagued by conflict and insecurity and, on the back of these circumstances, augment their global roles. Second, those different anti-colonial strategies and experiences can help to produce an alternative world political space materially, discursively, and relationally: Rather than being produced in and by the West (or merely contributing to the West), resistance is factored into the emergence of the international order from its inception. These processes are, however, not without internal contradictions. These find little expression in the respective global imaginaries they have helped to create. Historicizing successful anti-Western agency despite incomplete, patchy, and contradictory geopolitical "modernities" can help to re-think stale East-West divisions and ontological dichotomies. The conceptual and ideational understandings of world political alternatives

are directly related to concrete, material histories. This shows, finally, that the conceptual apparatus of IR is only poorly understood if abstracted from concrete social relations, real-life struggles, resistance struggles, and social transformation, more generally.

Notes

- 1 Though exceptional, the Italian colonial heritage is clearly visible in Ethiopia where especially fascist Italy's Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI) left a strong mark, amongst others in Addis Ababa's city planning. See for example, Ponzanesi (2000).
- 2 For a critique of this concept see Bilgin and Morton (2004).
- 3 For an account on how Turkey's decidedly Western orientation was a reaction to its immaterial insecurities in being recognized as equal by the West during the late Ottoman and early Republican era, see Bilgin (2009).
- 4 Though some of the developments during Turkey's War of Independence irritated Indian Muslims, they saw Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's campaign by and large as one of defending Islam and Asia as a whole (Özcan 1997: 198).
- 5 Many Arab nationalists had blamed the Ottoman administration for inviting Zionist settler activities after the liberalization of the Ottoman land regime in 1858.
- 6 Cypriot and Arab leaders frequently compare the Palestinian and Cypriot experience of being occupied. This despite the fact that the crisis was caused by a *coup d'état* in an attempt to Hellenize the island (Enosis). Far from being a pro-Western manoeuvre, Turkey's occupation led to the collapse of the complicit pro-Western military junta in Athens and to US sanctions.
- 7 There is an active academic debate on the nature of Turkey's "new" foreign policy. A summary of this debate would exceed the scope of this chapter while a single reference wouldn't do justice to the breadth of the debate.
- 8 Initially, arms were purchased from Tsarist Russia, which appeared intrigued by the Ethiopian success story.
- 9 Incidentally, the coffee trade across the Red Sea was first cultivated under Ottoman rule, introducing this new commodity to European markets.
- 10 Contemporary US Hip Hop lyrics also make frequent references to Ethiopia or "the Ethiopian Queen."

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