

Immersion of nations in developing societies

Written by Yishak Yared

The general concepts of a nation should not be understood simplistically. The historical process is very complicated and the emergence of each society as a nation requires detailed scrutiny.

In societies with extremely backward agricultural and pastoral economic systems, nationalism doesn't exist or exists only marginally and ephemerally. It was capitalism which brought about the emergence of nations and drew their boundaries. The spread of capitalism also led to interaction among nations and their recognition of each other. These were the conditions under which the boundaries of the developed nations took shape.

What interests us and other Third World peoples more is the process of the emergence of nations in developing societies. The social and administrative structure of people living in backward agricultural and pastoral societies can only have an ethnic/tribal or nationality basis, since their economic and especially commercial ties are weak and limited. Consequently, until the 19th century, there were only fragmented and unstable feudal polities, and no nations in Africa, including the Horn of Africa. Such feudal set-ups were not only torn by strife and invasions, but they also lacked continuity.

In the Horn of Africa, as in the rest of the continent, nations did not emerge from the gradual, internal development of these fragmented feudal entities. The process was forced by the advent of European colonialism. Had there been no European colonization of Africa, the formation of nations would have taken centuries and the political map of Africa would have been radically different from what it presently is.

To exploit the natural resources and manpower of the African peoples, European colonialism introduced advanced industrial know-how and machinery, dismantled traditional, social, administrative and economic systems, and spurred the process of nation building. The colonizers carved out territories, not in accordance with the wishes of the colonized people, but on the basis of their power and the competition and disputes among them, disputes which were settled either by agreement or force. Thus were drawn internationally recognized colonial boundaries and the geographical and political entities so demarcated begun to take shape under colonialism.

Immersion of nations in developing societies

Written by Yishak Yared

Initially, the colonial power organizes each entity under one administration and set-up a central colonial government. It alters fundamentally or preserves with desired modifications the traditional administrative system but in either case places it under an imposed paramount authority. It builds cities and ports; constructs roads, railway lines, airports and other installations; and introduces land, air and sea transport. It installs telephones and other communications networks. In order to exploit agricultural, animal and mineral resources, it develops vast expanses of land, introduces new means of production and seeds, and sets up mines. It establishes power stations, small factories and large-scale industries. It sets up health and educational facilities for the colonial officials, troops and settlers.

On another vein, the colonial power creates a group of “assimilados” whom it trains and employs. It recruits troops from the colonized people for the realization of its expansionist and repressive aims. It imposes racialist restrictions on movement and living conditions.

Thus, the colonial power introduces new relations of production, gradually dismantles the social structure and creates new social forces. The infrastructure it sets up brings closer the population which until then had no means of efficient communication. Its racial treatment and, its repressive and exploitative policies give rise to joint struggles by the colonized people and foster a common psychological make-up. These politico-administrative, economic, social, cultural and psychological processes combine to forge a nation.

The changes brought about by colonialism do not, however, affect the peoples of the evolving nations equally nor do they give rise to equal levels of development. For two reasons. Firstly, the colonial power concentrates its effort on regions it considers strategically and economically important. Secondly, the colonized peoples were at different stages of social, economic, cultural and religious development to begin with.