

Ilhan Omar and “Western Imperialism”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



On November 3, at a political rally with Bernie Sanders in Minneapolis, Ilhan Omar exclaimed that she was happy to have endorsed, and to campaign for, a candidate who “will fight against Western imperialism and fight for a just world.”

One would like to know what Omar meant by “Western imperialism.” The Americans never had an imperial empire; they never turned the Philippines and Cuba, that they had won in the Spanish-American War, in 1898, into colonies; there was no large-scale settlement of Americans in either place. There never has been an American colony in Africa; Liberia was not an American colony, but rather was intended to be an independent state populated by former slaves. The only place in the Americas where the United States has not a colony but a “territory” is Puerto Rico. Far from being exploited by

American imperialists, Puerto Rico receives \$21 billion a year from the American government. The Puerto Ricans apparently do not feel they are victims of American “imperialism” who demand independence – in 2018, 500,000 of them voted for statehood, while only 7,000 wanted independence.

Perhaps Ilhan Omar was thinking of the British as the quintessential “Western imperialists.” But the British Empire is long gone. The British pulled completely out of what is present-day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in 1947. They are nowhere else, as an imperial power, in Asia, including Hong Kong, which they turned over to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. In the Middle East, the British were in Iraq only as holders of the Mandate, tasked with guiding that country to full independence, as was achieved in 1932. The British also helped create the Emirate of Transjordan, which was never a British colony. There was a small British garrison in what was called the Crown Colony of Aden, but there were no “British colonists” in evidence; Aden was merely an entrepot to resupply ships going to and from India. In South America, the colony of British Guiana became independent in 1966. British Honduras, another colony, became independent, as the country of Belize, in 1981. In Africa, all of Britain’s former colonies, with one exception, had received their independence by 1968. That one exception was Southern Rhodesia, which received its independence, and a new name – Zimbabwe – in 1980. What examples of British imperialism does Ilhan Omar have in mind? Bermuda? Anguilla? Two tiny vacation spots that are not exploited by British colonials, but profit handsomely from Western tourism? Does she really think those islands would want to sever their ties to Great Britain?

Or could Omar be thinking of the French “imperialists”? Where are those French colonies that so offend her? The French left their last colony in North Africa, Algeria, in 1962, nearly 58 years ago. The vast territories of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa were given their independence by

1960. Perhaps Ilhan Omar has some vague notion that the French still rule these lands. As for the two Caribbean islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, and the two even smaller islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon in the North Atlantic, these are not colonies, but juridically parts of France itself, with full representation in the French Parliament.

There is one great imperialism that we can be sure Ilhan Omar does not recognize. This is the imperialism of the Muslim Arabs, who not only managed to conquer many lands and many peoples, but to impose their religion, and even their ethnic identity, on those peoples. Many of those peoples who converted to Islam, whether willingly, or out of a desire to escape the onerous conditions imposed on them as dhimmis (tolerated non-Muslims under Muslim rule), were so eager to identify with their conquerors, that that they took Arab names, and in some cases, assumed as well the name "Sayyid," which meant they were declaring themselves to be descendants of Muhammad's own tribe, the Quraysh. That is why the writer V. S. Naipaul, the scholar of Islam Anwar Sheikh, and many others have described Islam as the most successful imperialism in history, because those who are its victims identify completely with those victimizing them. Naipaul writes about this in *Among the Believers* – the Pakistanis, Malays, and Indonesians who , he discovered, all want to be "little Arabs."

This desire makes sense. After all, the Message of Allah was delivered in Arabic, and to a 7th-century Arab. Ideally, the Qur'an must be read and recited in Arabic. Muslims who prostrate themselves in prayer must always turn toward Mecca, in Arabia. They make the Hajj, too, to the same city of Mecca, again in Arabia. As a consequence of all this, Arabs enjoy the highest prestige among Islamic peoples, and non-Arab Muslims seek to identify with them.

Many of those victims of Muslim Arab imperialism were taught to regard their own pre-Islamic histories as of no interest or

significance; they dismissed those pasts as belonging to the Jahiliyya, the Time of Ignorance. A good example of this is the singular lack of interest shown by Muslim Pakistanis in the spectacular remains of Mohenjo-Daro, which dates from 2500 B.C., and is one of the world's earliest major cities. But it is from the pre-Islamic times of ignorance, and consequently is of no significance to Muslims.

Among those conquered by Muslim Arabs, many people replaced their indigenous languages with Arabic; speakers of Coptic in Egypt, Aramaic in Syria, and Tamazight in North Africa have noticeably decreased over the centuries. Even after the conquered peoples converted to Islam, as non-Arabs they were regarded as inferior. The Berbers in North Africa, the region's original inhabitants, today suffer from Arab cultural supremacism within their own lands, where their language, Tamazight, for a long time was prohibited from being taught or recognized as an official language – now it can again be taught in a few schools – and Berber culture continues to be suppressed. The Kurds, too, though Muslim, have been on the receiving end of Arab imperialism, that reached its apotheosis in Saddam Hussein's murderous Anfal campaign, when his Arab soldiers murdered 182,000 Kurds.

Many may not know that the greatest mass murder in history was that conducted by Muslims in India, during several centuries of Mughal rule, when 70-80 million Hindus were killed. Those Hindus who chose to convert were the ancestors of today's Muslims in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Does Ilhan Omar even know how Islam spread, through conquest, in India, and how many Hindus were its victims, and how many converted to Islam to avoid being killed? Perhaps she can be asked publicly about these matters; her display of ignorance will be most telling..

Where else do we see Muslim imperialism on display? Wherever Muslims are murdering non-Muslims in order to increase their own power, as with Boko Haram in Nigeria, and Abu Sayyaf in

the Philippines, or with Muslims killing Copts in Egypt. These are

attempts to strike terror in the hearts of non-Muslims, and if possible, to frighten some to convert, and to seize the lands, and sometimes to murder, those who refuse. Muslim imperialism is on the march, in a different way, even within European countries. Muslims have managed to carve out for themselves many No-Go areas, where non-Muslims fear to tread, and firemen enter only with police protection, and the police themselves enter only in groups. It's a new kind of imperialism, where the conquerors enter not as armed invaders, but as economic migrants, then begin to live, just as Western imperialists used to do, off the indigenous peoples in the countries they conquered. They do this without having to conquer others with weapons. Merely by being allowed to live in these Infidel lands in Europe, they find they can have every conceivable benefit lavished upon them: free or subsidized housing, free medical care, free education, unemployment benefits, family allowances. The huge sums transferred to these Muslim migrants by the state can be seen as a new form of imperialism, where one people lives off of another, in a conquest that is conducted through non-violent means, perfected by those Muslims who have been allowed to settle deep behind what they have always been taught are enemy lines, the lines of Dar al-Harb. This Islamic imperialism is just as effective as imperialist conquest in the classic sense, and is all the more dangerous for not being recognized by its victims for what it is.

A few questions might be addressed to the self-assured Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who is so eager to fight alongside Bernie Sanders against "Western imperialism."

Ms. Omar, can you give us examples of “Western imperialism” today that you think need to be addressed? Just to refresh your memory, the last American quasi-colony, the Philippines, received its full independence in 1946. Puerto Rico is a territory, not an exploited colony; it receives \$21 billion in aid from the American government each year; in 2017, 97% of Puerto Ricans voted for statehood; that certainly suggests they do not feel exploited by the United States. The last two British colonies of any size, Southern Rhodesia and British Honduras (now Belize), received their independence in 1980 and 1981, respectively. The small city-state of Hong Kong that was by then the very last Crown Colony was turned over to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, much to the regret of its inhabitants. The last French colony to receive independence was Algeria, in 1962. A handful of tiny French islands – Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Pierre and Miquelon – are now politically fully part of France, sending delegates to the French Parliament. So we remain puzzled about your determination to fight a non-existent “Western Imperialism.” Please tell us what you had in mind.

Ilhan Omar might consider abandoning her attempt to find examples of that “Western Imperialism” that so concerns her and to consider other imperialisms, outside the West. She might look into the Muslim Arabs who have not only conquered many peoples outside of Arabia during the past 1,400 years, but have convinced those peoples to identify completely with their conquerors, the Arabs, even taking Arab names upon conversion, and in some cases, assuming the name “Sayyid” in order to identify themselves as descendants of the tribe of the Prophet.

Does she recognize the conquest by Muslim Arabs of many lands and peoples as “imperialism,” or is that something that she

insists pertains only to the Western powers?

She might be asked what she makes of Egypt, where the entire population consisted of Coptic Christians before the Arabs arrived. How did that country go from being nearly 100% Coptic to becoming 85% Muslim? Does Ilhan Omar have any comment on how the Coptic Christians who remain are treated by the majority Muslims? She might be asked, too, what happened to the Zoroastrians of Persia, who disappeared almost entirely when the Muslim Arabs conquered that land, save for a group that found refuge in India where, ever since, they have been known as the Parsees. She might be asked, too, to comment on the situation of those Berbers today in North Africa, that is, those Berbers who have managed to withstand Arabization in Algeria and Morocco, who have had to fight hard to retain their Berber language, culture, and identity.

There are so many more questions she might be asked, but let's end our inquiry with two final questions for the Congresswoman.

"Ms. Omar, the Muslim imperialists who conquered India murdered between 70 and 80 million Hindus over several centuries of Muslim rule. Would you care to tell us what you make of that fact? And even today, Muslim terrorists, some based in Pakistan, still target Hindus in India. Think of those who have attacked the Parliament Building in New Delhi or, in 2008, hit 10 different sites in Mumbai. What do you believe they are after? Much of Indian territory was in 1947 given over to the creation of Muslim Pakistan (then West Pakistan) and Muslim Bangladesh (then East Pakistan). Yet Muslim terrorists continue to strike within India. Do they now want to conquer the rest of India? Does their Jihad against

India's Infidels have no end?

"And one last thing, Congresswoman. The late scholar of Islam, Anwar Sheikh, who had grown up as a Muslim, famously wrote that 'Islam is the vehicle for Arab supremacism.' Would you care to discuss what he meant by that lapidary formulation?"

Raising these matters might just make Ms. Omar more hesitate to inveigh against "Western Imperialism" and possibly cause her to tiptoe very carefully around the subject of "imperialism" altogether, now that she realizes that others are ready and willing to discuss the Arab and Muslim varieties, that have been much more extensive, and have claimed many more victims, than anything done by "Western imperialists." Should she choose, uncharacteristically, to shut up entirely about "imperialism," that is an outcome devoutly to be wished.