The Seige of Western Perseptions on The Ottoman Empire

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Abstract
This article explores the systematic attacks on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire by Western powers during the 19th and early 20th centuries, with a particular focus on the factors driving these attacks and their far-reaching consequences. Drawing upon a range of primary and academic sources, the article delves into the historical context, highlighting the Ottoman Empire's initial strength, its subsequent decline, and the emergence of the "Sick Man of Europe" narrative. It also analyzes the multifaceted reasons behind Western enmity toward the Ottoman Empire, encompassing religious, cultural, economic, strategic, and political dimensions. The article further investigates the internal problems faced by the Ottoman Empire, as well as external factors, such as the industrial revolution, imperialism, and the rise of nationalism in Europe, which amplified Western assaults on Ottoman perceptions. The impacts of these attacks, including military decline, weakening of the government structure, and the rise of nationalism, are scrutinized. In response to these challenges, the Ottoman Empire adopted various precautions, including modernizing education, printing books in Western languages, and sending emissaries to Europe. Nevertheless, the article concludes that these strategies largely failed due to limited resources, political instability, and resistance to change. Finally, the article distills lessons for the contemporary Islamic world, emphasizing the importance of education, technology, unity, and cultural defense in the face of external perceptions and the need for intercultural dialogue and economic development to enhance global understanding of Islam.
Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Western Perceptions, Attacks on Perceptions, Orientalism, Islamic Identity

Introduction

The siege by Western perceptions on the Ottoman Empire occurred over the centuries, especially during the time of Western colonialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time, many Western thinkers, especially the Orientalists, had belittled and degraded the Ottoman's political, economic, social, and cultural systems with the aim of destroying the vast influence held by the Ottoman Empire as seen by the world and then controlling its territories in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In addition, the industrial revolution in the 19th century brought great changes to politics, society, and the economy throughout the world, including the Islamic world. (Goffman, 2002; Quataert, 2005).

A Brief History of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire, also known as the Turkish Ottoman Empire, was an Islamic empire that first emerged in the 14th century under the leadership of Osman I. This empire extended across Anatolia, Balkans, Middle East, and North Africa, and it ruled for approximately 600 years before collapsing after the end of World War I. It collapsed in 1922, and in 1923, the modern Republic of Turkey based on secular values was established (Kucukcan, 2003).

During the height of the Ottoman Empire's rule in the 16th century, it became one of the most powerful empires in the world and controlled much of Southeast Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. This empire is also known for its efficient and advanced government system, mainly concerning the military, legal, and cultural systems.

However, in the 17th century, the Ottoman Empire's power began to decline and there was a prolonged period of decline in the 18th and 19th centuries due to various factors, such as Western attacks on the perception of the empire, internal instability, and administrative weaknesses (Sajdi, 2007).

The Ottoman Empire as the Main Target

Attacks on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire was part of Western colonialism efforts. The Ottoman Empire, as a great power that controlled most of the Middle East and Balkans, became the target of perceptions and actions by Western thinkers and external powers who considered it a threat to their interests.

The West had despised the power and contributions of the Ottoman Empire and considered it as an antiquated power; lagging far behind the progress made by the West. They believed that the Ottomans did not share the same level of intelligence or capability as Westerners in developing technology, industry, and knowledge. This type of thinking was accompanied by various actions, such as colonization, territorial division, as well as the imposition of Western culture and values.

In addition, Western perceptions about the Ottomans were also influenced by the orientalist view, which is a prejudiced view that is suspicious of Islamic culture and the Muslim society in the Middle East. This thinking is rooted in prejudices and stereotypes formed over the centuries about the Islamic religion and culture.

Attacks on the perceptions about the Ottoman Empire was also the reason for the birth of a nationalistic movement among the Muslim community in the regions controlled by the Ottoman Empire. This movement encouraged people to rise up against the central

government and liberate their regions by forming new break-away countries that they believe are more modern and nationalistic. This movement was orchestrated by Western powers who took advantage of the weakness and instability of the Ottoman Empire at that time.

In order to destroy the powerful Ottoman Empire, the West used various tactics and strategies, such as military and political approaches, including colonization and the separation of Ottoman territories. Besides that, they also used propaganda and dissemination of information that damaged the image of the Ottomans and weakened the support of the Muslim world towards the Ottomans. This strategy refers to the attack of Western thoughts or perceptions (Weismann & Zachs (Eds.), 2005).

However, this Western strategy failed to completely destroy the Ottoman Empire because the existing sultanate system was still able to survive for several more decades and overcome the various problems it faced. Moreover, under the rule of several competent and steadfast sultans, such as Abdul Hamid II and Mehmed V, the Ottomans were able to undertake significant reform and modernization initiatives (Macfie, 2014; Lewis, 1961).

Hence, due to the debilitated state of the Ottoman Empire in addition to efforts that aimed to destroy its reputation in the eyes of the world and the Muslim community, the orientalists called the Ottomans the "Sick People of Europe". They tried to portray an image that Europe is the centre of progress and strength, while the Islamic culture and religion centred in the Middle East, including the Ottoman Empire, was considered an obstacle to progress and modernity that the West wanted to propagate.

However, a small number of more objective Western historians and theorists criticized Western propaganda and explained that the Ottomans actually had contributed innumerable innovations and advances in the fields of economy, technology, and culture. They also described the Ottomans as having contributed significantly to the history and development of European civilization at that time (Robinson, 2010; Weismann & Zachs (Eds.), 2005).

Factors that Forged Western Enmity Towards the Ottoman Empire
There are several factors that caused the West to be anti-Ottoman at that time, among them are:

i. Religious differences: The hatred between the West and the Islamic world had taken root since the time of the Crusades and the wars that followed. Most of the Western society at that time saw the Islamic world as a religious enemy that needed to be opposed.
ii. Cultural differences: The West and the Islamic world have different cultures, and the West sees Islamic culture as inferior and uncivilized. This is mainly because most Western societies at that time were in the dark ages and lacked progress in science and technology compared to the Islamic world.
iii. Economic competition: The Ottoman Empire had a lot of wealth and natural resources that threatened the economic position of the West. In addition, the port of Istanbul became an important trading centre in the region and posed a threat to Western trade.

iv. Strategic Position: The Ottoman Empire occupied a strategic position in an area that was critical in terms of trade and geopolitics. Its existence in this area posed an obstacle to the West in terms of securing sources of wealth, such as spices and sugar in the Middle East and Asia.

v. Failure to Reform: The Ottoman Empire faced internal problems, as in weaknesses in administration as well as the failure to modernize and reform the political and social systems. The West saw this weakness as an overwhelming weakness in Islamic culture and presumed that the Islamic world is not aligned with Western culture.

Internal Problems Faced by the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire faced complex and varied internal problems for centuries. Some of the significant problems include

i. Weak central governance: The Ottoman Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries suffered from a weak central government, which allowed external powers, such as Russia and Austria, to take advantage and exert pressure on smaller Ottoman territories.

ii. Weak economy: Although the Ottoman economy in the 16th and 17th centuries was quite strong, it later declined and eventually the Ottoman Empire lost its position as a world economic power at that time.

iii. Identity crisis: Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Ottoman's identity and self-dignity were at a critical level due to several factors, such as the economic crisis, military weakness, and political problems. This then led to the emergence of nationalistic movements that challenged the government's authority.

iv. World War I: The Ottoman Empire allied with the Central Bloc during World War I, which resulted in their defeat. The war caused the loss of a large part of Ottoman territory and reduced their status and power.

v. Ethnic and religious conflicts: Ethnic and religious conflicts are also one of the internal problems that the Ottoman government often faced. Weaknesses in the government's administration and inter-ethnic unrest were taken advantage of by the enemy to create chaos (Quataert, 2005; Howard, 2017).

External Factors

In addition to internal problems, there were several external factors that accelerated and magnified the spread and impact of Western attacks on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire, some of which are mentioned below.

i. The industrial revolution in Europe: The industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries accelerated the value of modernization and changed the social and economic landscape in Europe. This gave impetus to European countries to expand their influence to other regions, including the Islamic world.

ii. Technology and military strength: Technological advancements and military capabilities in Europe in the late 18th and 19th centuries, such as modern firearms and warships, gave European nations an advantage over other nations around the world.

iii. Imperialism and colonialism: European countries, especially England and France, expanded their power through imperialism and colonialism in the 19th century. This resulted in the colonization of territories previously controlled by the Ottoman Empire.

iv. The rise of nationalism in Europe: The rise of nationalism in the 19th century influenced the Western view about the Ottoman Empire because it was considered a threat to the stability and security of Europe.

v. Social and cultural differences: Social and cultural differences between the Islamic world and the West caused misunderstandings and conflicts between the two. This led to the West's attack on perceptions about Islam, which resulted in the emergence of stereotypes and prejudices against the Muslim world (Ochsenwald & Fisher, 2011; Tolan et al., 2012; Sabet, 2010).

Effects of Attacks on Perceptions About the Ottoman Empire
The West's attacks on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire had a great impact on the political, social, and economic aspects of the empire. Some of these effects are:

i. Decline in military strength: The West's attack on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire had triggered the empire's military reform, but ironically, it brought a decline in the empire's military strength. Along with the achievements of Western technology, the Ottoman army was seen as losing its military prowess and bravery as a military power that was once feared by the world.

ii. Weakening of the government structure: The attack on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire had exposed the weaknesses in the Ottoman government's structure. The adoption of Western political and legal systems brought about changes in the structure of the government, as well as the emergence of debates and disagreements, especially between the government and religious groups.

iii. Emergence of the nationalistic movement: The West's attack on the perceptions brought with it the ideas of nationalism into the Ottoman Empire, which then triggered the nationalistic movement among the Ottoman community of various ethnicities and religions. This nationalistic movement later became an important factor that led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century (Quataert, 2005; Robinson, 2010).

Precautions Taken by the Ottoman Empire
The Ottoman Empire took several precautionary steps in the face of the onslaught of Western perceptions that occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries. These steps include:

i. Opening modern schools and universities: In the 19th century, the Ottomans opened modern schools and universities, such as Istanbul University and Darulfunun University, to introduce more modern and scientific Western thoughts, as well as to improve the intellectual and technological capabilities of the Ottomans. This step aimed to prepare the country for competition with the Western world.
ii. Printing books in Western languages: The Ottoman government printed books such as books in the field of science, history, and politics, in Western languages in order to expand public knowledge and counter Western propaganda.

iii. Sending emissaries to Europe: The Ottoman government also sent emissaries to Europe to study Western political, legal, and educational systems, in addition to establishing diplomatic relations with Western countries.

iv. Opening embassies and consulates in Europe: The Ottoman government opened embassies and consulates in Europe to strengthen diplomatic relations with Western countries and learn more about Western progress.

v. Opening modern industries: The Ottoman government built modern industries such as textile factories and weapons factories to reduce dependence on imported products from the West and improve the Ottoman economy.

Although the Ottoman government tried various strategies to counter the onslaught of Western perceptions, most of these strategies had failed. Several factors had led to the failure of the Ottoman government's strategies, some of which are stated below.

i. Limited resources: The Ottoman government had limited resources, both financial and expertise in nature, to enhance themselves and adapt to changing times, so they faced difficulty renewing and enhancing their systems and technologies.

ii. An unstable political situation: The West's attack on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire triggered debates and conflict within the Ottoman government, which led to political instability and this made it difficult for the government to take appropriate action.

iii. Lack of will to change: Some Ottoman rulers, especially at the end of their term in power, lacked the will to make major changes in their government system and culture, so they continued to maintain the old system and were unable to adapt to change (Lewis, 1961; Mejcher, 1989).

Lessons Learned
The Islamic world now needs to learn various lessons from the West's attacks on the perceptions about the Ottoman Empire, several of which are stated as follows:

i. Improve education: One way to overcome the attack on the perceptions is to improve the Islamic community's level of education and knowledge. Wider knowledge and a better understanding of the Islamic religion, culture, history, and politics will enable the Muslim community to overcome the onslaught of external perceptions and strengthen the community's belief in Islamic values.

ii. Develop technology and economy: Along with increasing the knowledge and education amongst the Islamic community, the development of technology and economy is also crucial. Economic and technological backwardness in the Islamic world has led to Islamic countries becoming more susceptible to various types of attacks from the West. This will render Muslims unable to compete with the West in various aspects of life. Most of the Islamic countries at that time could not maintain their intellectual and economic superiority, leading to a decline in their overall performance.

iii. Increasing solidarity and unity: One of the factors that debilitated the Ottoman Empire was the internal conflict as well as social and cultural differences prevalent in the country itself. Therefore, increasing solidarity and unity amongst the Islamic community is crucial. This initiative would help strengthen the Islamic community and overcome the West's attack on perceptions about the Ottoman Empire.

iv.   Defending the Islamic identity and values: One way to overcome the external attack on perceptions is to defend the identity and values of Islam that have existed since ancient times. The Islamic world should appreciate and defend Islamic intellectual heritage that is related to science, philosophy, and literature, as well as strengthen Islamic values that include camaraderie, justice, tolerance, and balance between religion and worldly affairs.

v.   Building networks and cooperation between Islamic countries: Islamic countries can consolidate themselves by forming networks and collaborations amongst themselves. In this way, they can support each other and stay united in the face of an external onslaught of perceptions. One example of this type of network is the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).

vi.   Organise intercultural dialogue and communication: It is important for the Islamic world to organise open dialogue sessions and communication with Western countries and the rest of the world to improve the world's perception of Islam and strengthen the understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Dialogue and communication can create opportunities for the Islamic community for introducing their values and identity in a positive and constructive manner.

vii.   Extend research: Research can be the key in overcoming attacks on perceptions, especially negative perceptions. Islamic countries can strengthen research in fields such as science, technology, philosophy, and Islamic literature. Reliable and quality research can help strengthen Islamic identity and values, as well as provide a broader insight into the modern world.

viii.   Developing media and communication channels: Media and communication channels can be an effective tool in strengthening the identity and values of Islam, as well as overcoming the external attack of perceptions about Islam. Muslim countries can develop strong and effective media and communication channels, including the social media, to create and propagate positive perceptions about Islam and strengthen relations with the non-Islamic world.

ix.   Developing the economy and well-being of the community: Improving the economy and the community's well-being can be an effective way to overcome these attacks on perceptions. Islamic countries can bolster their economy by increasing production and trade, as well as developing vital industries and businesses. Islamic countries can strengthen their identity and values by improving social well-being, as well as offer positive alternatives to society in the face of the onslaught of external perceptions on Islam (Sachedina, 1998; Hamoudi, 2009; Esposito, 2010; De Bellaigue, 2017; Malik, 2016).

Conclusion
Enhancing public awareness regarding Islamic identity and values is vital for fostering confidence and emotional stability in the face of Western onslaughts on perceptions about Islam. Thus, Islamic countries can diminish exposure to external influences and defend their identity by strengthening their religious and cultural identity.

In conclusion, overcoming the onslaught of Western perceptions about Islam requires a combination of efforts, such as economical, developmental, technological, and educational developments, as well as the community's awareness of religious identity and values. Islamic

countries can face this challenge more effectively, strengthen their position in the global world and create a positive perception by focusing on these measures.

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