

Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East¹²

Shalu Joseph³

A revolution involves the unforeseen overthrow of powerful institutions. Resistance by social groupings and the general populace is a constant in revolution. *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement* is a very informative, insightful, and well-researched work on the impact of colonialism on middle eastern countries. It looks at the role colonialism played in igniting revolutionary movements across the region and emphasizes the colonial country's socio-economic and political dominion over the land, resources, and people of the colonies. The book's nine chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion give readers a better understanding of the many historical stages of Egypt's Urabi⁴ revolution of 1882. The book exceeded its title because it thoroughly analyzed colonialism and Urabi movements as well as Egypt's sociocultural past.

Juan R I Cole⁵ is a well-known American scholar and observer on South Asia and the modern Middle East. Cole has dedicated his professional life to comprehending the Middle East and the Muslim world in general, as well as to critically assessing how it interacts with the North Atlantic states. He is the author of a large number of books.⁶ He was inspired to write this book by the popular perception of living and studying in Egypt. He contradicts the dominant elite view of the British conquest of Egypt. In this volume, the author examines historical instances or circumstances where social groupings or masses resistance resulted in social revolution. To address the topic of how the revolutionary movement in Egypt began and developed, it focuses on the socioeconomic and political predominance of the colonial power. Additionally, it examines how nationalist and Islamist beliefs influenced these revolutionary

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceas.2023.3.2.165>

² Juan R. I. Cole: *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East, Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. ISBN 0-691-05683-8. pp. 341.

³ PhD Candidate, Eötvös Loránd University, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9010-395X>; josphshalu24gmail.com

⁴ Urabi or Ahmed Urabi was a military officer and nationalist leader who played a significant role in the revolution of 1882.

⁵ For more information about the author, see:

Cole, J. R. I. (n. d.) Juan Cole: Home Page. Available at: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/jcpers.htm> (Accessed: 19 January 2024)

Cole, J. R. I. (n. d.) Curriculum Vitae. Available at: <https://umich.academia.edu/JuanCole/CurriculumVitae> (Accessed: 19 January 2024)

⁶ The renowned books of the author:

Cole, J. R. I. (ed.) (2021) *Peace Movements in Islam: History, Religion, and Politics*. London, New York, Dublin: I. B. Taurus, Bloomsbury Publishing. ISBN 978-0755643189

Cole, J. R. I. (2018) *Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires*. New York: Nation Books. ISBN 978-1568587820

Cole, J. R. I. (2014) *The New Arabs: How the Millennial Generation is Changing the Middle East*. New York: Simon and Schuster. ISBN 978-1-4516-9039-2



movements. The author begins his work by providing an insight into the historical background about the history of Egypt. The Urabi movement of 1882 is the central theme of this book. The Urabi Revolution was a conglomeration of revolutions occurring at the same time as resentments toward an exploiting social group grew within each stratum and eventually challenged the state, whose moment of weakness allowed the very circumstance that caused its collapse.

In an effort to explain a revolution, the author defines four approaches or explanatory components that worked together, which include social structure, which is the constitution of socio-economic classes; organization, which is more focused or stressed by resource mobilization theories; ideology, highlighted by Webstarian and social historians of ideas; and finally conjecture, the way in which events in one social sphere have an unexpected impact on other groups. He also mentions the central explanatory idea of sociologist Theda Skocpol⁷ in state and social relations. He then goes on to create a new story and elevate historical narratives. He believed that the Urabi Revolt was an uprising against the Ottoman Empire and colonial European powers. According to Cole, the revolution was the result of the events that occurred in Egypt over a three-decade period rather than an unexpected event.

Each chapter analyzes various facets of Egyptian culture and politics in the middle of the nineteenth century rather than providing a chronological account. The book can be divided into three sections. The first section analyzes the competing elites against which the protest movement formed, as well as socio-cultural shifts and state policies that have fueled political unrest. The next section focuses on the revolution, the political outlooks of various social strata, public tensions, conflicts between locals and colonialists, etc. The third section discusses political rebellion, including its relationship to speculative indigenous revolutions and British occupation.

It can also be considered a subaltern approach because he gives great importance to studying the role of the common man in the outbreak of this revolt. He points out that the growing intelligentsia, which included ulemas,⁸ professors, clerks, junior military officers, and journalists, was crucial in mobilizing the public. Cole characterizes the Urabi movement as a complete revolution with enormous popular support, in contrast to the western writers who see it as a protest or resistance by the subordinate military officers with weaker popular support. Many western writers considered it a minor revolt, not a massive revolution. Cole's analysis rejects the western view. The unforeseen convergence of these protesting groups led to the revolution. Each social group had its own surroundings, grievances, and goals. The movement was initially supported by Syrian Christians and large landowners. Even coffee shops played a significant role.

⁷ Theda Skocpol is an American sociologist and political scientist who made a great contribution to comparative politics and historical institutions.

⁸ Muslim scholars or men of authority in religion and law.

One of the major strengths of this book is that it makes considerable use of primary materials, including documents and manuscripts from the Egyptian National Archives, reports from the Arabic press, manuscripts from the Egyptian National Library, documents from the Egyptian Ministry of Finance, and records from the British Foreign Office. Second, it places a strong emphasis on the revolution's social and cultural aspects. Thirdly, he also incorporates literary criticism into his argument. Fourthly, the inclusion of comparative studies, which include the works of Theda Skocpol, Charles Tilly,⁹ George Rude,¹⁰ Benedict Anderson,¹¹ etc., is highly convincing. Fifth, an analysis of the years immediately preceding the 1882 event that spans three decades.

One of the main criticisms of this work is its extensive use of technical terminologies and theories, which the general reader may find difficult to understand. He incorporates the theories of many historians, sociologists, philosophers, and scholars. Secondly, the author's lively manner can occasionally come off as overly casual, especially in a work this dense. There are some typographical errors in the book. When Cole uses terminology like "neocolonialism" and "informal empire" interchangeably, it can be confusing because he also uses the term in a context from the 19th century.

Despite these small issues, Cole has written a fascinating and contentious book about nineteenth-century Egyptian history. This work is a remarkable and insightful study of colonialism and Urabi movement in Egypt. This book analyzes all aspect such as the socio-political, economic, cultural, and military factors instead of giving too much importance to Urabi, the one who played a significant role in the revolution. The majority of the discussions will likely take place in the context of the western discourse on middle eastern history, where Cole's contribution got a huge welcome. This study will reveal new avenues and will serve as a welcome catalyst for additional research.

⁹ Charles Tilly is an America sociologist and Political scientist who made a great study on thee relationship between politics and society.

¹⁰ George Rude is a British Historian Who focuses on French Revolution and 'History from Below.'

¹¹ Benedict Anderson is a political scientist who is best known for his book Imagined Communities.