Chapter 39

Africa, the Middle East, and Asia in the Era of Independence

OUTLINE

I. Introduction

The most difficult challenges in the Third World occurred after the colonizers had withdrawn. Divisions among ethnic groups, dependent economies, growing debt, cultural dependence on the West, and widespread social unrest made the progress of newly independent nations laborious and trying. Leaders adopted various strategies to resolve these problems.

II. The Challenges of Independence

A. Introduction

In many new nations, ethnic diversity led to disagreements and, in some cases, to civil war. To win independence, nationalist leaders had promised peasants and urban workers economic improvements and political rights. Following independence, these same leaders found it impossible to follow through on their assurances. There simply were not sufficient resources to provide the promised improvements. Failure to reach unrealistic goals led to rivalries among ethnic groups that threatened to disrupt the political processes completely. As they attempted to maintain their governments, leaders neglected other serious social and economic problems.

B. The Population Bomb

Most Western-educated leaders anticipated that industrialization would be the path to economic growth and prosperity. The most formidable barrier to rapid economic development was extraordinary population growth. Importation of new food crops from the Americas, infrastructure that cut down on regional famines, and the end of localized war all contributed to population growth in Asia and Africa as death rates declined. Medical improvements that cut into the mortality rates from tropical diseases also stimulated population increases. Population surges continued from independence almost to the present in many parts of Asia and all of Africa. Lacking industrialization to provide employment and to produce consumer goods, newly independent nations could not cope with increasing numbers of people. They also found it difficult to import food and raw materials from outside to supplement indigenous resources. Gains in productivity were rapidly overwhelmed by population increases. Although birth control programs have been introduced in the Third World, there has been resistance rooted in traditional culture to their use. Also, state leaders saw attempts to control population growth as a Western plot to limit expansion.
C. Parasitic Cities and Endangered Ecosystems

Massive internal migration to urban areas was one of the most common experiences of the postcolonial period in Africa and Asia. Lacking industrialization, the cities offered little in the way of employment, resulting in the construction of extensive slums. Masses of urban poor have proved to be politically volatile. In many Asian and African nations, cities are parasitic, dependent on imports of food from the countryside or abroad. Without factories, the cities provide little in return. Overpopulation in rural areas has depleted soils, led to deforestation, and destroyed tropical ecosystems. Despite having small industrial sectors, pollution in developing nations tends to be a significant problem.

D. Women’s Subordination and the Nature of Feminist Struggles in the Postcolonial Era

Women’s suffrage was often won as part of the postcolonial constitutions. In fact, women rarely achieved economic or social equality in the Third World nations. Most political posts, despite some noteworthy exceptions, have been reserved for males. Women who did achieve political leadership often did so because of connections to powerful men. Social expectations in developing nations require that women marry early and have large families. Little opportunity exists for education or a career. Poor medical care and food shortages have lowered life expectancies and resulted in malnutrition for many women. Although constitutions guaranteed civil and legal rights for women, in practice these rights are often ignored.

E. Neocolonialism, Cold War Rivalries, and Stunted Development

In order to begin the process of industrialization, nationalist leaders had few choices other than to accept capital from the West or the Soviet Union. Exports of raw materials and food products (what economists define as primary products) in exchange for capital continued to result in economic dependency. With the exception of petroleum-exporting nations, African and Asian countries have fared poorly in global markets. Even oil producers have been unable to cooperate sufficiently to prop up international prices indefinitely. African and Asian leaders blame continued dependency on neocolonialism. Corruption, inequities of wealth, and the failure of basic social and economic reforms have also contributed to the slow pace of development. Both the United States and the Soviet Union have extracted concessions in return for economic support of the Third World. Requirements include the oversight of expenditure, diplomatic alliances, and the reception of military bases. Creditor nations have more recently required the removal of subsidies to indigenous food supplies intended to keep prices low. Subsidy reductions have often resulted in resistance and popular violence.

III. Paths to Economic Growth and Social Justice

A. Introduction

Different leaders adopted varying approaches to social reform and economic progress. Programs have rarely been able to raise standards of living for the majority. Some solutions to problems have created new dilemmas.

B. Charismatic Populists and One-Party Rule

Kwame Nkrumah’s career as leader of Ghana was indicative of the lack of success enjoyed by those nationalists who retreated to authoritarian forms of government. After promising
reforms, Nkrumah discovered that he was unable to deliver. A leftist, Nkrumah lost support from the West. He also faced dissent from rival ethnic groups. Finally, cocoa, Ghana’s primary export product, fell in value on world markets. As his development failed, Nkrumah became increasinglydictatorial. He sought to engender mass support by references to African forms of culture and socialism. Nkrumah attempted to establish a cult of personality and successfully made himself an object of veneration in Ghana. When he left the country for a diplomatic mission in 1966, a military coup ousted him. He died in exile.

C. Military Responses: Dictatorships and Revolutions

Many newly independent nations passed through a period of military rule. Asian and African armies were often more resistant to ethnic and religious divisions. In periods of social conflict, they were often well placed to restore order. Because many of the military commanders were anti-Communist, they also attracted support from the West. Most military regimes were politically repressive. At their worst, military commanders, such as those in Uganda, Burma, and Zaire, sought to enrich themselves rather than introduce reforms. Too often, scarce economic resources were devoted to military hardware rather than development. Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt was an exception. He took power after a military coup in 1952 as part of the Free Officers movement. By 1954, all political parties were abolished. Nasser used dictatorial powers to force through radical social and economic reforms. He ordered the redistribution of land to peasants, provided free education, subsidized food prices, and created employment. Nasser also limited foreign investment and nationalized some foreign properties. In 1956, he was able to force the British to leave the Canal zone. Despite good intentions, Nasser’s development schemes often foundered through corruption, lack of adequate capitalization, and poor government planning. The Aswan Dam project, the cornerstone of economic development in Nasser’s Egypt, actually had more negative than positive results. Rising population wiped out development gains. An attempted aggressive foreign policy, which had generally poor results, also drained money from development schemes. Nasser’s successor, Anwar Sadat, slowly dismantled most of the government schemes. Sadat also sought a more profitable relationship with the West and ended the war with Israel. Sadat’s successor, Hosni Mubarak, has generally continued the trend to capitalism and away from state control.

D. The Indian Alternative: Development for Some of the People

India shared Nasser’s emphasis on socialism and state planning but managed to preserve civilian government. India began the process of development with a stronger industrial base and stronger infrastructure than did Egypt. India also possessed a larger middle class in proportion to its total population than any other Asian or African nation. Despite tremendous ethnic and religious diversity, India has been able to preserve both its unity and a democratic constitution. The Congress party has been able to retain its political dominance without repressing opposition. Under Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian government pushed state planning in some sectors but continued to welcome foreign investment and capitalism. Both industrial and agricultural productivity has expanded, and India has a major high-tech sector. Despite greater development than elsewhere, India also suffered from massive population growth and limited resources. Many Indians continue to live in abject poverty. Social reforms have been slow, leaving the poor with little perceived benefits from economic development.
E. Iran: Religious Revivalism and the Rejection of the West

The revolution that ousted the Shah of Iran in 1979 bears certain similarities to the Mahdist religious fervor of the 19th century. In seeking a more perfect Islamic community, the followers of the Ayatollah Khomeini rejected the West. Like the Mahdi before him, Khomeini promised to remove heretical and corrupt leaders, immediate sanctification for followers who fell in the religious war, and the restoration of social order on Islamic precepts. Iran had not been formally colonized but remained a European sphere of influence prior to 1945. There was neither the infrastructure nor the Western-educated middle class typical of colonies. Under the Pahlavi shahs, a program of Westernization and economic development was undertaken. The Shah’s failure to observe religious rituals alienated the Islamic leaders of his nation. The acceptance of Western capitalization also cost the Shah the support of much of the emerging Iranian middle class. In the crisis of 1978, the Shah discovered that his base of support was not sufficient to maintain power. Faced with the return of Khomeini from exile, the Shah chose to flee to the United States. Khomeini instituted a radical government based on Islamic religious leaders. The Islamic regime eradicated Western cultural and economic influences. Few social or economic reforms could be imposed, because Saddam Hussein, the leader of neighboring Iraq, invaded Iran’s borders. The war devastated the Iranian economy, but Khomeini continued the conflict despite being overmatched. Only in 1988 after massive losses did Khomeini accept an armistice. The war incapacitated Iran and left the nation isolated diplomatically.

F. South Africa: The Apartheid State and Its Demise

By the 1970s, South Africa was the largest area still dominated by a white minority. After the 1940s, white political control was consolidated under the Nationalist party and its institutionalized policy of racism, apartheid. In 1960, the Nationalists won independence from Britain. Apartheid completely separated whites from other groups. Whites monopolized the economy, the educational system, and politics. The government restricted black linguistic groups to homelands within South Africa. To maintain apartheid, the government developed into a police state funded from the mineral wealth of the nation. The government declared illegal black political organizations, such as the African National Congress. The regime imprisoned Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, ANC leaders, and killed others. South Africa promoted ethnic differences among the black community in order to lessen the possibility of joint action against apartheid. As resistance mounted, the government became increasingly repressive. In the 1980s, a global boycott of South Africa began to force a softening of the government’s attitudes. Moderate Afrikaner leaders such as F. W. De Klerk pressed for reforms. Following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, the government began to negotiate with black groups to provide political rights for the majority of South African citizens. Elections in 1994 brought an end to apartheid. Despite fears, the transition of power to the ANC was without violence. Problems remain in South Africa. Ethnic rivalries among blacks periodically result in violence. White supremacists still seek to undermine the concept of majority rule.

G. Comparison of Emerging Nations

There are many differences among emerging new nations despite their commonalities. India’s democracy sets it apart. The Middle East is distinguished by oil and the conflict surrounding Israel, as well as religious conflicts. The economic dependence religious revivals of Africa make it distinct.
IV. Global Connections: The Postcolonial Experience in the Cold War World Order

Most of the new nations came into existence with limitations imposed on them as a result of their colonial experience. Given the brief period of their existence, it is difficult to assess their performance in terms of economic development and social reform. Despite difficulties, most of the nations have survived. India’s continued ability to govern a multiethnic society demonstrates the resiliency of some new nations. The process of industrialization has always been accompanied by social crises. African and Asian nations have experienced these problems exacerbated by rampant population growth and initially dependent economies. Despite the initial cultural dominance of the West imposed through imperialism, Asian and African artists and authors have made great contributions.
TIMELINE

Insert the following events into the timeline. This should help you to compare important historical events chronologically.

- Free Officers overthrow Farouk in Egypt
- Nkrumah overthrown in Ghana
- Nasser expels British from Suez Canal zone
- Khomeini overthrows Shah of Iran
- Saddam Hussein annexes Kuwait to Iraq
- Independence for Bangladesh

1952
1956
1966
1972
1979
1990

TERMS, PEOPLE, EVENTS

The following terms, people, and events are important to your understanding of the chapter. Define each one.

Bangladesh  Biafra  Saddam Hussein
primary products  neocolonial economy  Gamal Abdul Nasser
Muslim Brotherhood  Free Officers movement  Anwar Sadat
Hosni Mubarak  Jawaharlal Nehru  Indira Gandhi
Green Revolution  Ayatollah Khomeini  homelands
African National Congress  Hasan al-Banna  Nelson Mandela
F. W. De Klerk  apartheid
MAP EXERCISE

The following exercise is intended to clarify the geophysical environment and the spatial relationships among the important objects and places mentioned in the chapter. Locate the following places on the map.

the equator  the tropical zone  former European colonies

How did the newly independent states of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia relate to the tropical zones and the equator? How does their geographical location help to explain their positions in the neocolonial economy? (Think in terms of climate and ecology.)
MAKING CONNECTIONS

*The following questions are intended to emphasize important ideas within the chapter.*

1. Why was there such difficulty in the Third World establishing national identities?
2. What accounts for high population growth in the Third World?
3. How are Third World cities different from those of the West?
4. Define the term ‘heocolonialism.”
5. In what way did Nasser’s military government differ from other military regimes?
6. How did India differ from Egypt? How were the two governments the same?
7. In what ways did the Khomeini revolution of 1979 in Iran resemble the 19th-century Mahdist movement?

PUTTING LARGER CONCEPTS TOGETHER

*The following questions test your ability to summarize the major conclusions of the chapter.*

1. To what extent were Third World problems the creation of imperialism? To what extent were they indigenous?
2. Compare and contrast the political, social, and economic development of Asian and African countries after independence with the countries of Latin America.
SELF-TEST OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

1. Which of the following was NOT a problem for the new nations created in the wake of the withdrawal of European imperialists?
   a. underdeveloped economies
   b. divisions among different ethnic groups and religions
   c. reconquest by Europeans
   d. concessions made to departing colonizers

2. Which of the following statements concerning the impact of colonizers on new nations is most accurate?
   a. Europeans established the boundaries of their colonies on the basis of the traditional states and civilizations that had existed prior to Western imperialism.
   b. Europeans carefully surveyed the boundary lines of their colonies to reduce disputes.
   c. European colonization resulted in ethnic and religious homogeneity in the new nations.
   d. Europeans hastily colonized Africa and established boundaries without reference to ethnic groups of cultural homogeneity.

3. Which of the following statements is NOT true?
   a. Factors making for population growth only began to take effect in the late 19th century.
   b. Colonial rule brought an end to local war that caused population losses.
   c. New railroad links created by the colonizers cut down on regional famines.
   d. Improved hygiene and medical treatment played little part in the population increase until the 20th century.

4. One of the chief by-products of population growth in the Third World has been
   a. industrialization.
   b. mass migration to cities.
   c. the imposition of effective birth control programs.
   d. intensive programs of land redistribution.

5. The continued relegation of Third World economies to dependence is referred to as
   a. the Malthusian principle.
   b. Western supremacy.
   c. neocolonialism.
   d. global retardation.

6. One of the most common elements of African and Asian governments since decolonization is
   a. the creation of liberal democracies.
   b. military takeovers.
   c. communism.
   d. effective industrialization.
7. The military in Third World nations
   a. lacked the technical training found among the nationalist leaders.
   b. were committed to the preservation of civilian rule.
   c. were more resistant to division by religious and ethnic rivalries.
   d. had little impact on the political structure of Third World nations.

8. Gamal Abdul Nasser
   a. participated in the Free Officers movement that toppled the khedive Farouk in 1952.
   b. was assassinated in 1939 by the Egyptian secret police.
   c. was an Islamic fundamentalist whose movement closely resembled that of the Mahdists.
   d. joined the Muslim Brotherhood after coming to power in 1959.

9. In which of the following ways was India similar to Egypt following decolonization?
   a. level of industrialization
   b. emphasis on socialism and state intervention in the economy
   c. military takeover of the government
   d. size of the middle class

10. From 1948, South African politics were dominated by
    a. the Nationalist party.
    b. the black leadership of the Zulu nation.
    d. a U.N. mandate government dominated by the United States.