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Decolonization and its legacy

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Although decolonization has been one of the most significant events in the twentieth century, transforming colonies and dependent territories into nation states, it remains an amorphous term because of the different phases and varieties of decolonization. This chapter excludes the pre-twentieth-century movements of independence in the Americas, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand, and focuses on the movements for independence from Western and Japanese colonial rule principally in Asia and Africa from the early part of the century until the 1980s. I do include the "decolonization" of several countries in this region that were never fully or formally colonized, eg. China, Iran, Siam, and others, because they shared several important characteristics and most especially a world view with the anti-colonial movements mentioned above, that, while transformed, continues to be relevant today.[1]

Conceived narrowly, decolonization refers to the transfer of institutional and legal control by colonial governments over their territories and dependencies to indigenously based, formally sovereign states. But the movement was a much wider one, championing claims to human justice that had been denied by imperialism. Decolonization can be approached from a very wide range of perspectives including those of economic and social, cultural, and environmental histories, among others. I have chosen to focus on political and ideological themes in the relationship of decolonization to imperialism, nationalism, and especially the Cold War, because this is a neglected issue and has the potential to change the ways we look at several of the other approaches.

The victory of Japan over Russia in 1905, symbolizing the first military defeat of a modern European state by an Asian one, gave the nascent decolonization

1 Many of the details cited in this chapter are taken from Prasenjit Duara, ed., *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then* (London: Routledge, 2004).

movement a fillip. A number of anti-colonial resistance groups began to perceive their movements as part of a worldwide and world-redeeming project. While the movement is seen to have reached a climax in the Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian solidarity in 1955, decolonization movements particularly in smaller countries in Africa and Caribbean and Pacific islands continued until the 1980s.

Both 1905, the Russian defeat at the hands of the Japanese, and 1955, the Bandung Conference, may be seen as inflection points, but they are also ambiguous moments that reveal weaknesses and fault-lines in the movement. They urge us to contemplate not only the ideals and efforts to usher in a new era, but structural problems within the national model and the (heretofore) imperialist nation state system which these societies aspired to reform. Stated briefly, these problems have to do with re-hauling complex and pluralistic historical societies into nations with a disciplined loyalty to the state. Secondly, these societies aspired to fulfill universal humanist goals even while the nation state's design had evolved to compete for resources and domination in the world.

This chapter describes the general course of decolonization with these tensions in mind. The latter part of the chapter probes these issues through the Cold War order which complicated the decolonization movement. Finally, I consider the legacy of decolonization ideals and ideologies in the post-Cold War period, particularly of the Chinese revolution and in Middle Eastern societies where Islamism also became intertwined with the anti-imperialist movement.

Imperialism and anti-imperialism

The imperialism of Western nation states and, later, Japan spread, beginning roughly in the mid-eighteenth century, to Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and Pacific islands. The brutal and de-humanizing conditions it imposed upon these places have been well documented, most graphically by the independence movements themselves. At the same time, as Karl Marx noted, this imperialism represented an incorporation of these regions into the modern capitalist system although on deeply unequal terms. Typically, the principal beneficiaries of colonial rule – apart from the colonial masters – were the entrepreneurial and service classes that inhabited the port cities such as Algiers, Accra, Luanda, Cape Town, Aden, Bombay, Calcutta, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, which were often the principal nodes linking imperialist commercial interests with colonial hinterlands. Many from these classes were

able to improve their material positions and learn the languages and skills of the colonizers.

At the same time, however, these brokers and entrepreneurs experienced the indignities of a racist colonialism which imposed very concrete limits on their career and business possibilities, on where they could live and socialize, and with respect to recognition of their cultural identities. Educated Chinese bristled at the signs of "Dogs and Chinese not allowed" widely believed to be posted in public places in the foreign settlements in Shanghai and elsewhere. These were people who experienced constant denial and humiliation because of their color or origins, but they were also people who, like Mahatma Gandhi, clearly recognized the contradictions these actions presented to the Western doctrines of humanism and rationality. Finally, they were the people who understood the modern world well enough to know how to mobilize the resources to topple colonial domination.

Apart from the inequalities generated by imperial privilege and advantage, colonized societies also witnessed the massive erosion of existing communities which experienced the deepening impact of capitalism and alien cultural values. Everywhere native intellectuals complained of the erosion of rural ties, the decline of village industries and rapid class differentiation. The extent to which these communities were able to adapt to the new circumstances depended upon the historically available capacities they were able to muster as well as their position and role in the imperialist incorporation process. Thus it was not uncommon to find a dualistic type of society in the colonies: on the one hand, an adaptive and relatively modern, coastal, urban sector, integrated under however unequal terms, with metropolitan society. On the other hand, one finds a vast hinterland where historical forms of social life, economic organization, and exploitation, continued to exist, but hardly as pristine "tradition."

This is the phenomenon known in dependency theory as "the articulation of modes of production," whereby modern capitalism utilizes non-capitalist modes of production and exploitation for the production of capitalist value. Whether responding to global prices or a plantation economy, these regions also serviced the modern capitalist sector of the metropolitan economy, but, typically, they received few of its benefits. In other words, the gap should not to be seen merely as the difference between a traditional and a modern sector, but as different kinds of incorporation into the capitalist system. The gap between these two sectors and ways of life would often shape and bedevil the decolonization process.

Colonization in the nineteenth century had been justified by Social Darwinist rhetoric which held that the colonies were non-nations and unable to engage in civilized economic and political intercourse. Darwin's theory of "the survival of the fittest" was applied to races and nations and justified imperialist domination through an understanding that a race or nation that did not dominate would instead be dominated. The rhetoric of Social Darwinism intensified in the late nineteenth century when imperialist competition also accelerated, particularly as late-comer capitalist states such as Germany, Italy, the US, Russia, and Japan sought to gain resources and market share from the established imperialist powers of Atlantic Europe. The two world wars of the twentieth century were triggered by the challenges posed by late-comer nation states such as Japan and Germany.

In the early twentieth century, the lessons learnt by most leaders in the decolonization movements were that the only way their societies could survive and succeed in the global capitalist system was to refashion them into nations equipped with a progressive vision of history, an industrial economy, modern institutions, and a disciplined and mobilized population. To be sure, some of the important decolonization thinkers, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore from India were convinced early that reproducing the capitalist nation state in their societies would perpetuate many of the ills of industrialism and competition they were decrying, but they remained in a minority.

Furthermore, during the early stages of the decolonization movement, the goal was not always the establishment of independent nation states. The British Commonwealth format was followed by the French in Africa and the Japanese in East Asia devising ideals of political affiliation under the new rhetoric of a federated empire that attracted some followings among the colonized. However, the imperialists were ultimately unable to share power and the ideal of the sovereign nation state became increasingly dominant. National independence therefore became the goal of decolonization.

In seeking recognition and membership in the system of nation states, the colonized sought to reproduce in most important respects the society of the colonizer. While these would-be nations, like existing ones, celebrated their unique and ancient traditions, they were – perhaps in the very process – entering a phase of what we might call "cognitive globalization." The overhaul of institutions and culture entailed national versions of essentially global conceptions not only of technical standards such as the hertz or kilos, but of the person (such as the "child" or the "deviant") and the world (as constituted by homologous, historically evolving nations). As such, it would be difficult

for them to avoid the difficulties revealed earlier by the competitiveness and aggressive behavior towards other societies.

By the end of the Great War (1914–1918), the critique of the injustices of Western capitalist civilization became an integral part of the decolonization movement. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and Woodrow Wilson's formulation of the Fourteen Points and principles of self-determination in 1918 encouraged the global anti-imperialist movement espoused by leaders in India and China such as Gandhi, Sun Yat-sen, and Jawaharlal Nehru. They were followed by a more radical generation including Mao Zedong in China, Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and thinkers like Frantz Fanon in Algeria and Jalal Al-i Ahmad, whose ideas inspired the Islamic Revolution in Iran after 1979.

Thus by the end of the 1910s, the anti-imperialist movement began to develop its distinctive character. Fundamentally, it combined the advocacy of the nation state with an emancipatory vision seeking to overcome – though sometimes also absorb – Social Darwinism. The vision combined socialist goals with a view of civilization that was alternative to the European conception of Enlightenment civilization. The horrors of the First World War had discredited the European colonizers' claims to civilization and "civilizing mission." Many intellectuals East and West turned instead to indigenous traditions to formulate alternative civilizational ideals that opposed Western notions of materialism and conquest. Thus, for instance, Gandhi spoke of a self-sufficient and non-materialist Hindu culture. Sun Yat-sen promoted the peaceful path of the sage-king (*wangdao*). Later, Nkrumah would emphasize the communitarianism of Africa. However, each also sought to balance these civilizational traditions with Enlightenment goals of rationality and progress. Arguably, it could hardly have been otherwise if they were to join the global system of nation states.

Socialism, which was the other aspect of the decolonization vision, became increasingly important from the 1920s, after the Communist International turned its attention to the colonized world, and reached its height with the Vietnam War in the 1960s. While Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh were full-fledged revolutionaries who created socialist nation states with full state-ownership of land and the other means of production, most other anti-colonial leaders, such as Nehru, conceived of a socialist society to mitigate the stratifying effects of capitalism and implement their critique of capitalist imperialism. They developed a mixed type of economy which combined a strongly interventionist role of the state including redistributionist policies with a limited sphere of private enterprise.

The attempt to harmonize socialism (which was, of course, also a Western doctrine) with an alternative conception of civilization enabled decolonization in significant ways. It reconciled the critique of injustice in the system with identity claims for recognition in that very system. But the balance was never easy to sustain. Thus Indian modernizers had to ignore or contain Gandhi's ideas of a return to a simple peasant society. Even Frantz Fanon, who represented perhaps the most radical and anti-traditionalist voice of decolonization, struggled to reconcile elements of Islam, such as existing conceptions of womanhood, with a socialist revolution. Others like Jalal Al-i Ahmad, a one-time Marxist, turned ultimately to the model of a radical Islam. Today's China, socialist in name only, has opted to join a competitive capitalist system of nation states.

Politically, the great challenge that lay ahead of the decolonizing movement was to mobilize the hinterlands and the impoverished classes barely touched by modern ideas. For many in these communities, loyalty to the nation state was an abstraction quite removed from their everyday consciousness and the modern programs of secular society, national education, or the nuclear family were quite inimical to their conceptions of a good society – involving regional, linguistic, religious, caste, tribal, lineage solidarity – and religious life. Yet for the modernizing elites, the peasants and the "people" lived in a world that was increasingly alien and distasteful to them and the new language of modernity, historical progress, citizenship, and the like increased the gap between the two still further.

Thus the urban leadership had not only to bridge the gap between these rapidly diverging worlds, but to remake hinterland society in their own image. This image derived both from the modern humanistic conception of social reform and from the necessity to create a disciplined and obedient workforce that could power the national economy to succeed – or survive – in a world of competitive capitalism. These two tasks – to fulfill the promise of its humanistic ideals and modern citizenship and to create the conditions for international competitiveness – were often in tension with each other. To the extent that these conditions required the production of a homogenized people, there was also often a violent transformation of the lives and world views of people who were forced to adapt to a world in which the benefits to them were not always clear. Thus for instance, Gandhi even renounced the ideal of modern industrialization and advocated rural reform and national self-sufficiency. Socialists, on the other hand, renounced competitive capitalism in favor of a more equitable form of industrialization. Neither, it turned out, survived the twentieth century.

From the Great War through the Second World War

The economic and political developments of the interwar years accelerated the pressures on empires, particularly the British Empire. After the First World War, Britain faced a serious devaluation of the pound sterling following the steep wartime debts it ran up with the United States. By the 1930s, Britain became increasingly dependent on the colonies' resources to stabilize the pound in relation to the dollar and other hard currencies and its balance of payments.[2] This was, however, also a time when the anti-imperialist movement in the colonies began to make increasing demands for economic and political parity. The imperialist powers sought to create economic blocs in which colonies or subordinate territories were promised self-governing status and other concessions and sometimes even constituted as nominally sovereign nation states (such as Manchukuo), although they remained militarily in thrall to the metropole. Thus decolonization was preceded by a kind of imperialism of nation states which reflected a strategic reorientation of the periphery to be part of an organic formation designed to attain or retain global supremacy for the imperial power.

But the value of the British pound sterling continued to deteriorate through World War Two and after as well. Given its dependence on colonial earnings in sterling, Britain undertook an implicit contract with several of these colonies, such as India, Malaya, and South Africa. In exchange for their export earnings, it would introduce social welfare and development programs in the colonies with the goal of preparing them for political self-governance, although not independence. A Social Welfare Advisory Committee was even set up in 1943 to advise the Colonial Office.[3] This implicit contract with the colonies, in most cases, worked against the interests of the colonies because Britain did not have the economic resources to introduce adequate welfare and development programs.[4]

Economic and political forces continued to make empire unviable for the British. The Great Depression of the 1930s had driven down agricultural

2 Allister Hinds, *Britain's Sterling Colonial Policy and Decolonization, 1939–1958* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 11, 29.

3 Kwong-leung Tang, *Colonial State and Social Policy: Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong, 1842–1997* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998), p. 50.

4 Michael Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and Its Tropical Colonies, 1850–1960* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 306; Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914–1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), p. 276.

prices steeply and many of the colonies specializing in agricultural cash crops, including the Dutch and French colonies, witnessed great suffering. During this period political unrest and demands for independence were also working against closer integration. In other words, political self-governance and closer economic integration, the central features of the British strategy, began to militate against each other.

It was not until the 1950s, however, that Britain began to give up hope of empire. This was the decade that stretched from the independence of India in 1947 to 1957. In 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of the Egypt who was to formulate the ideas of Arab socialism, had ordered the nationalization of the Suez Canal. An Anglo-French-Israeli coalition of forces declared war against Egypt and occupied Suez. But the new powers in the United Nations forced them to withdraw, thus enhancing the stature of Nasser and the anti-imperialist forces in the world. It also became clear during this decade that the remaining major sterling surplus colonies, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, and Malaya, were not going to be happy with self-governance in a system where the metropole still called the shots.[5]

The two world wars played a undeniable role in accelerating decolonization. If the First World War unleashed the discursive and political conditions for the anti-imperialist movement to coalesce, and the interwar years destroyed the economic rationale of empire, the Second World War pretty much destroyed the credibility of the imperialist nation state system as it existed till then. The spectacle of the old colonial powers being overrun by the Axis forces in North Africa and particularly by Japan in Southeast Asia (threatening British India), the establishment of formally independent states in Southeast Asia under the rhetoric of pan-Asianism, the prominence of leaders like Sukarno and the Burmese leader U Nu who would lead nationalist movements against the returning colonial powers in the Japanese dominated wartime governments, and the further rise of the United States and Soviet Union, made eventual decolonization a matter of time in most parts of the world.

We can summarize the basic phases of the Afro-Asian decolonization movement here. Although there were several developments in the period before the Second World War, such as the end of the British protectorate in Afghanistan in 1919, Egypt in 1922, and the end of its mandate over Iraq in 1932, Britain continued to station troops and exercise political influence over these territories. The first phase of the transfer of sovereign power began

5 Hinds, *Britain's Sterling Colonial Policy*, pp. 146, 197.

with the Second World War when the Allied Powers recognized full sovereignty of the Kuomintang (KMT) regime in China by abrogating the unequal treaties under which China had been reduced to a semi-colony. The US Congress ended US extraterritorial rights in China in 1943. But China only regained full sovereignty after the surrender of Japan in 1945 and the removal of the Japanese military from various parts of China. China also gained a seat in the United Nations and its Security Council, which was transferred from the representative of the Republic of China in Taiwan to the People's Republic in 1971.

The Japanese surrender in 1945 also led to independence in Korea and various parts of Southeast Asia, including the independence of the Philippines from the United States in 1946. But the European colonial powers in remaining Southeast Asia sought to regain their colonies, leading most famously to the French wars in Indochina. The United States took over the French mantle once it became clear that Vietnam would otherwise be dominated by communism, and hence the anti-colonial war became entangled in the politics of the Cold War, discussed below. So too did Korea, which became divided into a Soviet- and China-supported North and a United States- and Japan-supported South Korea. The superpowers fought a proxy war through the two Koreas between 1950 and 1953, and tensions between the two sides last until this day.

By 1947–1948, Great Britain withdrew from its South Asian empire including India, Ceylon, and Burma and relinquished its protectorate and mandated power in Jordan and Palestine. Some scholars have argued that the hurried departure of the imperialist powers caused them to "divide and quit," leaving behind furious and festering conflicts between opposed contenders to the right to rule. This applies to places in the Middle East, Indochina, and especially the Indian subcontinent, which was torn by the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 during which over a million people were killed as Hindus and Muslims were forced or driven to evacuate their homelands for alien lands ruled by their new nation states.[6]

In the 1950s and 1960s, many African, Asian, and Middle Eastern colonies and dependencies gained their independence from Britain, France, Portugal, and Belgium. Anti-colonial resistance had developed in Sub-Saharan Africa long before the Second World War, but these activities began to cohere into distinct movements in the post-Second World War era. In South and East Africa, resistance was often directed against the white settler colonialists who

6 Radha Kumar, "The troubled history of partition," in Duara, ed., *Decolonization*, pp. 162–175.

appropriated communal land and imposed heavy taxes on the populace. Kenneth Kaunda had led the Zambian movement of independence modeled on the Gandhian politics of non-violence and constitutional reform. But the intransigence of racist settler colonialists in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) led him in the mid-1960s to renounce non-violence and support armed struggle as did several other colonies in the region.[7]

In Kenya, resistance to settler domination culminated in the Mau Mau rebellion of the 1950s which was crushed mercilessly, but is remembered as the most powerful symbol of armed resistance to imperialism in the region. In some ways, the Mau Mau also combined the uneasy alliance of socialist nationalism with more local and traditionalist expressions of resistance, although there was a very strong presence of women in the Mau Mau resistance.[8] In West Africa, modern labor movements in cities had become quite developed by the immediate postwar era and represented an important threat to colonial authorities. Nationalist and Pan-Africanist leaders like Guinea's Ahmed Sékou Touré and Gold Coast's (later to become Ghana) Kwame Nkrumah built their movements significantly upon these workers' activism and organizations.[9]

Other than the Vietnam War, which was now part of the hot Cold War, this phase of the decolonization movement was dramatized most visibly by the Algerian War (1954–1962). Like the Vietnam War, this was a complex affair with several different parties, including the *pieds-noir* or the European settlers in Algeria. The powerful symbolism and memories of the war in France and Algeria have been distilled by the writings and role of Frantz Fanon (Fig. 15.1). Fanon (1925–1961) was born in Martinique, educated in France, and worked as a psychiatrist in Algeria. He became a leader of the Algerian National Front and wrote several books, the most well-known of which is *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon is regarded as one of the most important thinkers of the decolonization movement largely because of his psychological understanding of the effects of colonialism on both colonizer and colonized and his deployment of counter-colonial conceptions of hybridity and creolism. He was also sensitive to the transition from colonialism to the neo-colonialism of the United States, and advocated a revolutionary

7 Robert J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 250–251.
8 Ibid. p. 366.
9 Frederick Cooper, "The dialectics of decolonization: nationalism and labour movements in post-war French Africa," in Duara, ed., *Decolonization*, pp. 218–238.

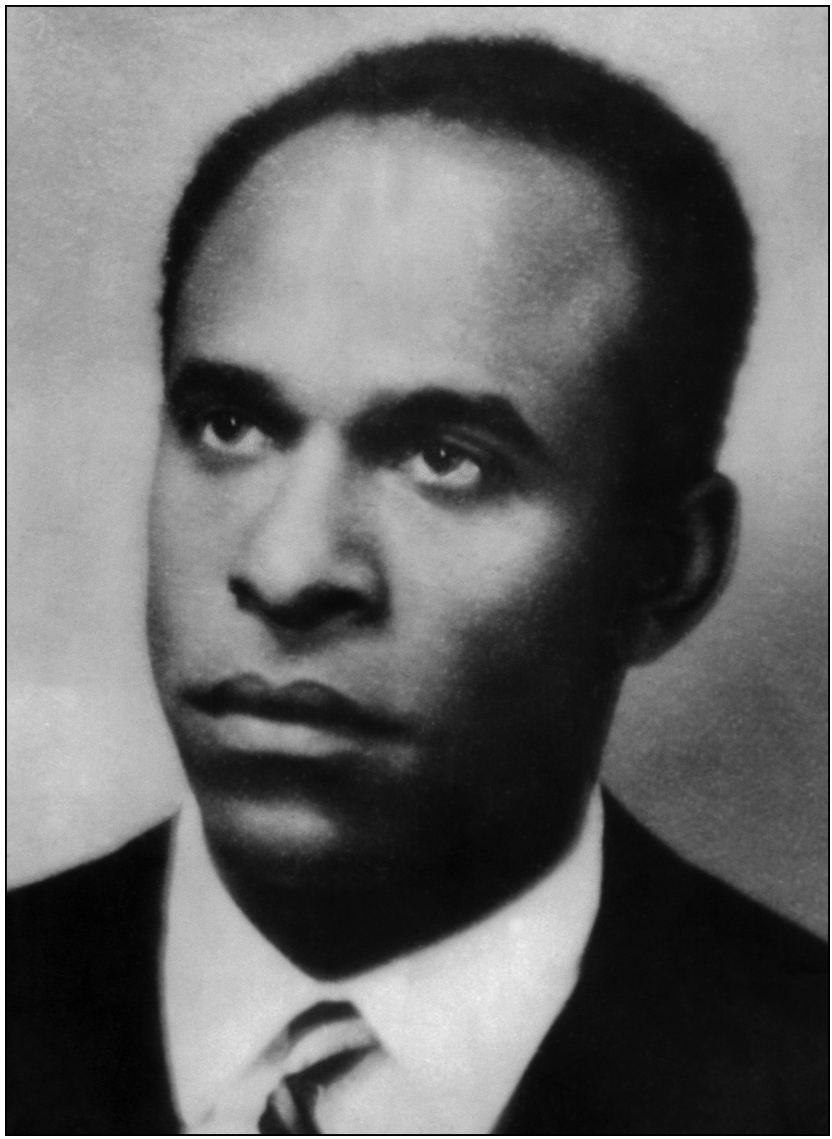

Figure 15.1 Portrait of the psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon (AFP/Getty Images)

Figure 15.2 Mahatma Gandhi on his famous March to the Sea to make salt, in defiance of the British salt monopoly, in India during 1930
(© Bettmann/Corbis)

anti-colonial violence that would generate "new men" even as it destroyed the colonial psyche.

Elaborating upon some of the same themes regarding the colonization of the mind, Mahatma Gandhi (Fig. 15.2) was perhaps the other great thinker and leader of the decolonization movement. Gandhi sought to recover older subjectivities and ideas that colonialism had destroyed among both colonized and colonizer, for instance of androgyny which he asserted had been destroyed by colonial attitudes of hyper-masculinity. However, Gandhi maintained a principled opposition to violence. Gandhi's philosophy and strategy of decolonization began with reconstructing the self of the colonized (and colonizer). *Swaraj* was not only self-rule referring to political independence, but self-mastery over desires and irrationalities. By engaging in *satyagraha* or "truth force" the individual and the collective – through such strategies as civil disobedience – would be able to triumph over an unjust political power.

The various nationalist movements combined different strategies or methods of force and violence with education and peaceful mobilization to achieve their goals. Thus leaders like Nkrumah in Ghana and Gandhi in

India were able to achieve mass mobilization relatively peacefully, but in the absence of significant land reform or economic integration, the class and rural–urban gap persisted. Revolutionary nationalists like Mao Zedong or Ho Chi Minh succeeded in restructuring the inequities of rural society, but often at the cost of massive violence. Other nationalist movements, like that led by Sukarno in Indonesia, were prevented by the structure of Dutch colonial control from achieving any significant rural mobilization.

Decolonization and the Cold War

In many ways, the establishment of the United Nations and its ideal of national self-determination operating within an equally ideal co-operative system of nation states represented the goals of the decolonization movement. Without unduly gainsaying the achievements of the United Nations in many dimensions of national development, the real world order, particularly in the first forty years after its establishment, was, however, shaped much more by superpower tensions and rivalries which affected the nature of the decolonizing polities and politics.

The superpower rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States (1947–1991), and later affected by the rise of China as an autonomous nuclear power, came to be known famously as the era of the Cold War. The Cold War order ran parallel and was much more influential than the United Nations world order. The superpowers and their relationships with the newly independent or decolonizing postwar states reflected some of the same asymmetrical power relationships that characterized those between imperialist and colonial or semi-colonial states, particularly during the inter-war years. The client-states of these superpowers were formally constituted or superficially equipped as sovereign nation states, but they were militarily dependent upon the superpower – just as they had been in the military thrall of colonial powers. While there were many significant differences between subordination under colonial and Cold War powers, let us look at some of the similarities.

The basic similarity arose from the fact that both imperialist and Cold War superpowers were nation states involved in a competitive system vying for global dominance over other people and resources. While the dominance of ideology in the Cold War – pitting socialism and social justice versus capitalism and liberal freedoms – gave the superpowers ideals to strive for and mobilize around, practically, these powers frequently rode roughshod over those ideals for the sake of national and imperial interests. There were also

major differences. Superpowers could not deny the power of mobilized nationalisms in the decolonizing states and they frequently worked with their nationalist allies for development in the client states, even while they benefited economically from these new nations. Moreover, because there were only two superpowers and because the new states had more autonomy than the fully dominated colonies, they could sometimes play one side off against the other, as for instance Ghana, Egypt, and to a lesser extent, India demonstrated.

Indeed, the Cold War order was more continuous with the efforts and experiments conducted by the late-comer imperialist Japan in its Asian empire. Partly because nationalism was already awakened in East Asia and partly because of Japan's pan-Asianist ideology and sympathies, Japanese militarists during the 1930s claimed to be merely the leader of a federation of Asian nations. They declared their commitment to overthrow Western domination of Asian societies and cultures for the sake of Asia. Japan's pan-Asianist imperialist policies began with the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo (1932–1945) in northeast China, a vast state four times the land area of Japan and with a population of about 40 million in the 1940s. Faced with a powerful Chinese nationalism on the mainland, Japan found it more efficient to foster modern and *indirectly* controlled institutions in the dependency. The goal was to control it by dominating the institutions of mobilization, such as banks, transportation infrastructure, political institutions (like political parties), and most of all, of course, the military. During the Pacific War, Japan extended this strategy with the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere of Asian societies that it claimed to liberate from Western powers under a new anti-imperialist alliance. These temporarily "liberated" societies, however, quickly realized that they were to be subordinated to Japanese military, economic, and strategic goals, and racist attitudes.[10]

As the upholders of the post- World War Two and post-colonial world order enshrined in the United Nations, both the Soviet Union and the United States were of course champions of national self-determination. Even before their revolution in 1917, the Bolsheviks had come out in support of the policy of national self-determination of peoples in the world and particularly for the myriad peoples of the Tsarist Empire. While they perceived the national revolution to be almost as important, perhaps, as the class revolution, the Russian communist state was also aware of the potential of the rhetoric of

10 See Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

national self-determination to be utilized to keep the erstwhile empire within the control of the new Soviet nation state.

In some ways, the breakdown of the Soviet "empire" within the Tsarist territories and in East Europe and Asia that began in the late 1980s could be arguably treated as the extension of the decolonization project that began earlier in the century. That, however, creates a more complex problematique for understanding decolonization than we wish to develop here. The reason I bring up the Soviet case is to indicate the attitude and policies of a Cold War superpower towards national self-determination, an approach that also influenced its attitude towards the new nations. Both the Soviet Union and the United States were capable of exercising their domination of these newly independent states even while they supported the rhetoric and institutions of their national development. Although the Soviet policy boomeranged, it indicates how this domination could be achieved for a period.

The goals of the Bolsheviks were to grant the smaller communities of the former Tsarist Empire, such as Ukrainians and Uzbeks, "nationhood," partly in order to facilitate centralized rule by defining the categories of identity and by controlling the party structure. The idea was to ultimately subordinate these national loyalties to "proletarian" interests, that is to the Communist parties in the non-Russian territories. They sought to contain, control, and even harness different sources of dissent by creating national-territorial structures of administrative control and fostering loyal national elites through the Party. The aim was to make the peripheral peoples into nationalities, but also into a Soviet *narod* (people) where they would be merged together under communism. Interestingly, this strategy ultimately backfired: the Soviets did a great deal to institutionalize territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental categories of political and personal understanding; but they did not build the idea and loyalty to the Soviet state very strongly. As a result, at the end of the Cold War during the 1980s, when economic crises and political reforms (*glasnost*) began to fatally weaken the Soviet state, the peripheral nationalities were able to achieve their independence from the Russian national core.[11]

In the United States, the attitude towards the new nations was by no means identical to the Soviet configuration, but there were distinct and radical changes in the attitude of the superpower towards the new nations,

11 Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Press, 2005), pp. 6–8.

in great part shaped by the imperatives of the Cold War and the appeal of the Soviet Union and socialism among these nations.

Historically the United States, which had also often championed anti-colonialism, had a paternalistic attitude towards smaller and weaker nations. During the 1920s, for instance, the United States sought to develop informal control over Central American countries, especially as it encountered anti-US nationalism in the region. Officials, diplomats, and business groups maintained indirect US domination through control of banking, communication facilities, investments in natural resources, and training of elites in American-style constitutions, "free elections," and orthodox business ideas. As Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane wrote in 1922, "What a people hold they hold as trustees for the world . . . It is good American practice. The Monroe Doctrine is an expression of it . . . That is why we are talking of backward peoples and recognizing for them another law than that of self-determination, a limited law of self-determination, a leading-string law."[12] The threat and reality of military intervention remained close at hand and the United States repeatedly intervened militarily in these countries both before and after the Second World War.

The United States distanced itself from European racial imperialism, but it continued to erect racist barriers to citizenship – for instance against Asian immigrants – until 1942. Moreover, the decolonizing world noted a distinct ambivalence of the United States towards the ability of darker-skinned people to govern themselves through the early postwar decades. Indeed, the United States sometimes became implicated in efforts by European powers to restore their imperial claims in the colonies.

In the era of United Nations multinationalism, however, US attitudes towards colonialism and race underwent an important change. The postwar attitudes developed in the context of the rivalry with the Soviet Union for the allegiance of the new decolonizing nations. It was the Cold War itself that induced many of these changes. Christina Klein has shown in her exploration of "middlebrow culture" in the United States how the fear of the loss of Asia to communism led to radical changes, curiously, in the image of American nationhood as premised upon a multicultural society. She uses the idea of cultural hegemony to show how representations of Asia and the Pacific reinforced the "Cold War consensus" which supported US expansion of

12 Quoted in Robert Freeman Smith, "Republican policy and the Pax Americana, 1921–1932," in William Appleman Williams, ed., *From Colony to Empire: Essays in the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: John Wiley, 1972), pp. 243–275; quote on p. 271.

power across the world through the 1950s. Through these representations, "structures of feeling" were created, which worked to channel ideological configurations into the field of emotions, experience, and consciousness of ordinary people. What Klein calls "Cold War Orientalism" did not merely seek to contain communism; it sought to sentimentally integrate Americans with Orientals who had not yet been made communist, both within the United States and internationally.[13]

The image of the United States as "the nation of nations" is exemplified by the enormously successful historical novel by James Michener (1959) called *Hawaii*. As a land of diverse cultures, Hawai'i represented the model of racial utopia with its flows and mingling of Polynesian, Japanese, Chinese, and New England whites. It is perhaps not too surprising that the Civil Rights Movement which had begun earlier was given a major boost in this environment and also took inspiration from the decolonizing movement. At the same time, the foremost American designers became deeply involved with promoting the idea of the "Asian Modern." Ceramic, wooden, woven grass, bamboo, and lacquered craftware were adapted to American tastes and designed to create an "international modernism" in the 1950s and 1960s, "which suited the American taste for friendly comfort and distanced itself from the cold European modernist style."[14]

This new-found appreciation for non-Western and non-communist nations and cultures, however, continued to be channeled through the paternalistic designs of enlightenment for the unfortunate and child-like Asians and other backward peoples. Klein notes that the image of Asians as metaphorical children to American parents, as well as the postwar phenomenon of adoption of many Asian children pioneered by Pearl Buck's organization, justified American intervention in Asia. Klein describes a discourse in which the world is normatively peopled not by inherently limited races or cultures, but by a "family of nations."[15]

The change in global rhetoric and attitude towards the colonized, semi-colonized, and exploited non-Western world, especially among the Cold War superpowers, was doubtless a triumph of anti-colonialism globally. But the rhetoric and developmental paternalism of the superpowers tended to conceal new types of domination of the new states.

13 Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 7–16.
14 Yuko Kikuchi, "Russel Wright and Japan: bridging Japonisme and good design through craft," *Journal of Modern Craft* 1:3 (2008), 357–382; quote on 372.
15 Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, pp. 253–263.

The equilibrium of Cold War rivalry tended to congeal political structures of nation states organized in the two camps. The territorial boundaries and institutional arrangements established to the superpower's advantage in the new nation states were often backed militarily by the superpowers. The latter sought to preserve or acquiesce in the dominant groups that had formed the client nation state, often because any change or destabilization might strengthen the other side. Thus these new states were frequently built by unpopular regimes or dominant ethnic groups or simply military groups which suppressed old and new aspirations.

The consequence of this pattern of Cold War order was that the kind of nation state building that took place among the decolonizing states was dominated by militarism and civil war. Between 1960 and 1987, per capita military expenditure in the world increased by almost 150 percent, while GNP per capita rose about 60 percent. In a dozen rich states, including the USSR, the military budget declined from 6.9 percent of GNP in 1960 to 5.5 percent in 1984. But in the decolonizing world, this percentage rose from 3.6 to 5.6 percent, indicating a larger expenditure from much smaller incomes. Even in the 1980s, 40 percent of third world states, not including Latin America, were military states, and civil war led to mass refugee movements and took the greatest toll on human life. Superpower support and involvement, particularly through the transfer or sale of arms, in exchange for resources and political support in the Cold War, was evidently among the most important factors behind militarization.[16]

In many parts of Asia and Africa, the superpowers became involved with the different sides of the anti-colonial struggles that had developed in the first half of the twentieth century. The prime example is the Vietnam War, in which, conservatively, over a million Vietnamese were killed, and in which the United States spent US$111 billion between 1965 and 1975 (equivalent to US$686 billion in 2008).[17] The principal socialist power backing the Vietnamese (until around 1969) was not the USSR, but the People's Republic of China. Between 1965 and 1969, China provided considerable support to the Vietnamese, dispatching over 300,000 engineering and anti-aircraft troops to North Vietnam. China had also been by far the more active socialist power

16 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 209, 221. For some examples from Southeast Asia, see Anthony Reid, *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

17 Stephen Daggett, "Costs of major U.S. wars," CRS Report for Congress, Order Code RS22926, July 24, 2008, CRS-2, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/108054.pdf.

in the Korean War between 1950 and 1953.[18] As for the United States, the Vietnam War strained its financial and moral power and contributed to the relative weakening of US economic strength vis-à-vis Japan and Europe. By and large the Cold War had a deeply divisive impact on the decolonizing world, weakening what counter-hegemonic potential it possessed.

The newly independent nations were thus born into a deeply divided world in which they were often forced to take sides in order to survive. In East Asia, the independence of China, Korea, and many Southeast Asian states from Japan and European colonial states became quickly entangled in the Cold War divisions. This resulted in "hot" and enormously destructive wars in Korea and Indochina and heavy militarization in the rest of East Asia. The conditions of this division, as I have indicated, tended to freeze regimes that often had not developed popular support but were backed by the military support afforded by the superpower. Thus even while the United States and its allies championed democracy and freedom as their goals, more often than not in the developing world they ended up supporting undemocratic military regimes, dictators, and monarchies alienated from the aspirations of ordinary people. Among US client states, the popular (*minjung*) movement in Korea took the lead in 1979 by opposing the Park Chung-hee military regime and contributing to its demise. Subsequently, other democratization movements also emerged in recently decolonized societies of Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines, where President Ferdinand Marcos had established martial law in 1972, Taiwan (1987), and Indonesia (1998).

The frequent intervention of Western powers to protect their interests in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia (in addition to US operations in Latin America) polarized and radicalized large segments of the population in these societies. The most dramatic intervention in Africa took place after Congo won its independence from Belgium in 1960. Patrice Lumumba, who tried to build an independent nation state on the socialist model, and to align his nation with the Soviet Union, was removed from power, and was finally murdered by his opponents backed militarily by the Europeans and the Kennedy administration. Congo became a vast client state of the United States, with huge investments in its mineral resources. Similarly the coup directed against Sukarno and the communists in Indonesia, where hundreds of thousands of people were killed in 1965, had the tacit backing of the CIA.[19]

18 Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 229.

19 Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 167.

A revealing instance of how a process of decolonization was aborted significantly by the Cold War is the case of Pakistan. Hamza Alavi has shown that the strong military alliance with Pakistan, including a highly secretive US military base in Pakistan near the Persian Gulf, did not, contrary to Indian views, have to do with its rivalry with India. Rather it was part of a new Anglo-American strategy, starting in the early 1950s, for the defence of oil interests in the Gulf against both Soviet influence and radical nationalism in the region. The extent of American involvement with the Pakistani military was so great that it completely marginalized the civilian government, even before the first military coup in that country in 1959. The US–Pakistan relationship and the deteriorating relations between India and China, as well as between the Soviet Union and China, led India, despite its official non-aligned stand, to tilt towards the Soviet Union. It received considerable military and industrial support from the latter. Although the United States has been careful not to overtly support Pakistan in the wars against India, it is nonetheless ironic that it found itself allied with the wrong side when it came to democracy and the national aspirations of Bangladeshis.[20] The extensive militarization of Pakistani society and the consequent weakness of democratic and secular forces – which were the ideals of its founders – continue to this day.

Soviet intervention in the newly independent states of Asia and Africa was not as extensive or committed until 1979 when it became mired in the fatal occupation of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union was more occupied with instabilities in its own camp requiring extended periods of military occupation in parts of Eastern Europe such as Poland and Romania (till 1956 and 1958, respectively) and, more famously, with the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring in 1968. While the Soviets supported radical movements in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, these were largely home-grown Marxist or leftist movements which sought the support of the Soviet bloc.

Early Soviet leaders were not quite convinced that revolution could be truly successful in these societies, even though it was important for Soviet superpower status to be influential in the emerging nation states and utilize them for the goals of Soviet socialism. Communist victory in Vietnam, among other developments in the 1970s, however, emboldened the Soviet leadership to intervene more actively in places such as Ethiopia, Angola, and

20 Hamza Alavi, "The origins and significance of the Pakistan–US military alliance," in http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/sangat/HAMZA.htm.

finally, in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. Afghanistan also represented the spread of Islamist radicalism as an alternative to the ideologies of socialism and capitalism and to the legitimacy of the national unit as the boundary of Cold War politics.[21]

The legacy of decolonization

But if many new nations were unable to fulfill their desires for full sovereignty or their people's aspirations for truly representative institutions because of their subordination to the Cold War order, they were also hampered by the competitive nation state system which they elected to enter. I believe this is clear from the fate of the non-aligned movement which many of them championed in the 1950s, 1960s, and later.

We have referred to the celebratory high point of this movement in the Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian solidarity, a meeting of the representatives of twenty-nine new nations of Asia and Africa, held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, fifty years after the Russo-Japanese war signaled the beginnings of pan-Asianism. The conference aimed to express solidarity against imperialism and racism, and promote economic and cultural co-operation among these nations. China, India, and Indonesia were key players in the meeting. The conference finally led to the non-aligned movement in 1961, a wider force led by Yugoslavia's Tito, Nehru, and Nasser, in which participants avowed their distance from the two superpowers – aligning themselves neither with the United States nor the Soviet Union (Fig. 15.3).

However, conflicts developed among these non-aligned nations and the non-aligned movement did not make the desired impact its leaders had wanted. Some of the conflicts that developed among these nations were a consequence of the Cold War; neither neutrality nor solidarity was much in evidence among the decolonized states. Other territorial disputes and resource wars resulted from older colonial policies and claims. Thus, for instance, the border war between India and China in 1962 was a consequence of a disputed colonial period demarcation of the border between the two nations called the McMahon Line. But the persistence of the rivalry between the two nations also has to do with competition over resources and influence in the world. Moreover, conflicts between Iran and Iraq (1980–1988), India and Pakistan (1947, 1965, 1971), Indonesia and Malaysia (1962–1966), China and

21 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapters 7 and 8.

Figure 15.3 Gamal Abdel Nasser (CL) of Egypt talking with Jawaharlal Nehru (CR) of India during the Bandung Conference
(Howard Sochurek/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)

Vietnam (1979), and Libya and Egypt (1977), among others, indicate that international conflicts among decolonizing nations have not been rare.

But while we may argue that the Cold War and the dynamics of national competition may have undermined the decolonizing movement, it is also true that the decolonizing ideals played a role in ending the Cold War. I have discussed this issue at some length elsewhere, so I will just refer to it briefly in conclusion here. First, it is now clear that China's role was critical to the end of the Cold War although this was not necessarily deliberate. After the split between the Soviet Union and China, China itself became a potential superpower when it acquired nuclear capacity in 1964. As the Sino–Soviet relationship continued to deteriorate, especially during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s – hovering, the Chinese believed, on the brink of nuclear war – the United States also suffered great losses in the Vietnam War. The United States saw the opportunity to neutralize China in what had developed as a three-sided Cold War. In brief, the neutralization and even support of China that resulted from the famous US–China rapprochement in 1972 led to an imbalance and pressure upon the Soviet Union. Meanwhile the Soviet Union, which had become mired in the Afghan war from 1979, was outspent militarily by the Reagan regime which also supported the Chinese nuclear

military program.[22] The critical factor here is the Chinese autonomy from the Soviet Union which was made possible by Mao and the party's commitment to the goals of the communist revolution.

A second factor contributing to the end of the Cold War was Islamism. From the early 1980s the *mujahidin*, militarily supported by the United States and its Muslim allies, played the major role in driving out the Soviets from Afghanistan and bringing the Taliban to power. The *mujahidin*, in turn, had been encouraged and strengthened by the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. The rise of Islamism – whose advocates were denied the right to mobilize in the client states of both superpowers – represented dissatisfaction with the Cold War options of capitalist and socialist modernity.[23] Not a few of the Islamic thinkers of the period of decolonization had begun as socialists or modernizing reformers, but with the growing disenchantment of the Cold War options, they began to integrate the religious and redemptive claims of their religious tradition into their demands for full decolonization. While the combination of Islamic ideas and revolutionary nationalist ones may seem to some today to be unusual if not contradictory, during the 1950s and 1960s, many leaders and thinkers found them to be compatible. Indeed, a report from the *Economist* on November 3, 1955, noted that Chinese communism under Mao and Islamic ideals were coming together in their efforts to liberate the world.

One such thinker who represented the convergence and subsequent disillusionment was Jalal Al-i Ahmad (1923–1969), a Marxist turned Islamist in Iran who died a full decade before the 1979 Iranian Revolution but whose work became widely read before and during the revolution. In Al-i Ahmad's view, the socialist camp was no less materialist and greedy than capitalist colonizers and represented "would-be corporate colonists" who could sit quite comfortably at the same table as their capitalist counterparts. What offended him particularly were the hypocritical designs of enlightenment that stripped a people of their culture and identity. "Thus only we in our Islamic totality, formal and real, obstructed the spread (through colonialism,

22 Shirley Kan, *U.S.–China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*. Updated May 10, 2005, CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Order Code RL32496/, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/48835.pdf. For effects of the arms race and the Strategic Defense Initiative on the Soviet Union, see Eric Ringmar, "The recognition game: Soviet Russia against the West," *Cooperation and Conflict* 37:2 (2002), 115–136; 130. See also Hanhimäki and Westad, eds., *The Cold War*, pp. 274–275.

23 Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

effectively equivalent to Christianity) of European civilization, that is, the opening of new markets to the West's industries."[24] In the decolonization period, this religious call had been integrated into the decolonization struggle. Today Islamism has become much more autonomous and has even turned against the system of nation states.

Both Chinese revolutionary energy and Islamism emerged from their struggles against imperialism and drew their confidence and strength from these paths, whether they were progressive or tradition-directed. They could be said to be the most vigorous nodes in the ideology of decolonization that we have described above. With the rapid spread of global capitalism in the post-Cold War era, the national form taken by these societies has adapted to respond largely to the requirements of global capitalist competitiveness, especially in Asia where social stratification has once again grown. But even as the hybrid socialist-civilizational vision of decolonization has been forgotten in the mainstream of these decolonizing societies, both revolutionary Maoism and Islamic radicalism have continued to reverberate among the poor in the world. Apart from these extreme options, however, we may ask if there were also other ideals and experiments undertaken in the capacious decolonization movement that could be adapted to the demands for justice in these times.

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24 Jalal Al-i Ahmad, "Diagnosing an illness," in Duara, ed., *Decolonization*, pp. 56–63; quotation from p. 62.

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