Cultural Trends In Arab History


وقل رب زدني علما
جامعة دمشق
Damascus University

The University of Damascus
Open-Learning Centre
The Department of Translation

Cultural Trends In Arab History

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A textbook in English on historical culture and thought (level 2) intended for learners of English, Dept. of Translation, whose level of English is between lower intermediate and upper intermediate.

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Dedication

To Jumana, Nizar and Nabeel

For my late Parents,
without whom I could have
remained illiterate.

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Acknowledgment

First of all, I would like to thank Damascus University represented, in particular, by its President, Professor Hani Murtada, and Vice-President, Professor Nabeel al-Batal, for authorizing different professors at the University to reconsider the various syllabi at the Open-learning Centre and design new ones. This has certainly provided me with an exceptional opportunity to read, choose, compile, and edit some of the works mentioned in the bibliography of this book. This task has motivated me to spend long and tedious hours of work, hoping to present a reasonably good work on cultural trends that have marked and delineated most of the cultural history of humanity, both technological and sociopolitical.

Last but not least, I feel indebted to my sister-in-law, the would-be doctor, Carolyn Calmes Shammas, for providing me with over ten thousand pages of the latest writings in this field from the USA, during her

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Finally, I cannot forget the soft part of my heart, Nateel, Nizar, and Jumana, who tolerated my being mentally away from them for the whole period of work. I would like to remind them that to work for Syria is to be with them and work for them.

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Introduction

This book discusses the main cultural trends that have greatly influenced Arab thought and culture for a considerable time span that extended from the appearance of Islam down to our present day. These trends have in fact shaped Arab concept of time and place, of the world and the hereafter, and of the persistent outlook on daily activities and practices. Consequently, some features of Arab Mid-eastern cultural and political history are discussed in a somewhat chronological sense. This goes in harmony with the requirements of the First-Year (2^{nd}. Term) course of ***Culture*** at the Open-Learning Centre, Damascus University.

The book, therefore, falls into three Parts: the first Part focuses on the main trend of the new thought as represented by the appearance of ISLAM, its doctrine and influence on the way of life of many nations and cultures. The second Part concentrates on the political actions triggered by the appearance of Islam and its doctrine; it also pictures the incidents that took place as a result of friction and interaction between the Arab Islamic world

and the opposing ideologies in other parts of the world. Part Three mirrors the Arab society/societies and the very socio-political and economic changes that have been taking place until recently in most Arab countries: even the ways of life induced by the new trend of thought and whatever reaction it has motivated is discussed in some detail. Thus, new habits, conventions, architecture, poverty, social strata, and even daily life practices are not ignored in this part of the book. It is hoped that such a detailed picture of all aspects of life, socio-political and cultural, will form an adequate outlook that may help our learners to understand and appreciate exposure to different aspects of thought and formulate their own trends of thinking and, thus, read the world history of culture from their own perspective.

The second and third Parts, therefore, provide a vivid, though challenging, picture of Arab, particularly Mid-eastern, history from the viewpoint of Arab and Western writers. It focuses on all aspects of life – economic, political, and social – in a way that calls for debate and discussion.

Each part is divided into a number of chapters according to the subject matter dealt with in each chapter. The chapter is further subdivided into sections for ease of reference and convenience of study. Finally, each section is concluded with a number of questions and exercises that have to be tackled in class to further the learners' understanding and appreciation of all the ideas presented in this book.

The learner is expected to read the material very carefully and questionably: what is written in the various sections and chapters of this book, whether in Part one, two, or three, **is not biblical**, nor is it intended to distort the facts or to convince others of different values other than theirs; it is only an expression of the views of some writers as they discern the issues presented and the problems discussed. Therefore, the learners are advised to negotiate every notion in the book, evaluate its orientation and, whenever they could, present an alternative to the ideas they read and the arguments they encounter. Incidentally, most of these ideas and analyses on Cultural Trends In Arab History are adapted from Hourani, A. (1991) with some modifications for the ease of reference and classroom management in the

process of learning and/or teaching. The book is simply meant for readings about *Arab culture and history* ***in English***.

After discussions of and arguments about the notions of the book, however, it is essential for the students to answer the questions at the end of each section to familiarize themselves with the content of the book and understand its ideas. Such discussion will prove fruitful to the learner on both the level of *language use* and that of assimilating the *ideas* presented in the book.

The tutor is expected to help his/her learners understand both the language of the book and the detailed thoughts presented in it. This can be done in different ways: one way is translating excerpts from the various chapters and sections of the book into the mother tongue; another is interpreting the text in the same foreign language, i.e. English, and explicating the unfamiliar terms and ideas to the learners. However, for ensuring better understanding of the material as a whole on the part of the learner, discussion of the ideas is a must; it should never be ignored. The questions presented at the end of each section

are generally key questions that pave the way towards discussion that may involve agreement and disagreement. In the end, we have all to recognize that *culture* itself is a product of negotiation, debate, and even negative friction between various parties representing and/or holding different views and leading incompatible ways of life and thinking in different social settings.

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PART I: The Making Of A World: An Arab Islamic World


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Chapter One: A New Power In An Old World

1. 1 Introduction

In the early seventh century a religious movement appeared on the margins of the great empires, those of the Byzantines and Sassanians (Sassanids), which dominated the western half of the world. In Mecca, a town in western Arabia, Muhammad began to call men and women to moral reform and submission to the will of God as expressed in what has been accepted as divine messages revealed to him and later embodied in a book, the Qur'an. In the name of the new religion, Islam, armies drawn from inhabitants of Arabia conquered the surrounding countries and founded a new empire, the caliphate, which included much of the territory of the Byzantine Empire and all that of the Sasanian (Sassanid), and extended from central Asia to Spain. The centre of power moved from Arabia to Damascus in Syria under the Umayyad caliphs, and then to Baghdad in Iraq under the Abbasids.

By the tenth century the caliphate was breaking up, and rival caliphates appeared in Egypt and Spain, but the social and cultural unity, which had developed within it, continued. A large part of the population had become Muslims (that is to say, adherents of the religion of Islam), although Jewish, Christian and other communities remained; the Arabic language had spread and became the medium of a culture which incorporated elements from the traditions of peoples absorbed into the Muslim world, and expressed itself in literature and in systems of law, theology, and spirituality. Within different physical environments, Muslim societies developed distinctive institutions and forms; the links established between countries in the Mediterranean basin and in that of the Indian Ocean created a single trading system and brought about changes in agriculture and crafts, providing the basis for the growth of great cities with an urban civilization expressed in buildings of a distinctive Islamic style.

Questions & Exercises

1) How did the Islamic message come to existence?

2) What happened to the Caliphate in the tenth century? Explain in detail.

3) Was the Islamic caliphate an empire attempting to conquer the world or a New World Order serving the welfare of all nations?

I. 2 The World Into Which The Arabs Came

The world of Ibn Khaldun must have seemed everlasting to most of those who belonged to it, but he himself knew that it had replaced an earlier one. Seven hundred years before his time, the countries he knew had had a different face, beneath the sway of 'the two greatest powers of their time'.

For many centuries the countries of the Mediterranean basin had been part of the Roman Empire. A settled countryside produced grain, fruits, wine and oil, and trade was carried along peaceful sea-routes; in the great cities, a wealthy class of many origins shared in the Greek and Latin culture of the empire. From the fourth century of the Christian era, the centre of imperial power had moved

eastwards. Constantinople replaced Rome as the capital city; there, the emperor was the focus of loyalty and the symbol of cohesion. Later, there appeared what has been called a 'horizontal division' which was to remain in other forms until our own time. In Germany, England, France, Spain and northern Italy, barbarian kings ruled, although the sense of belonging to the Roman Empire still existed; southern Italy, Sicily, the north African coast, Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, and Greece remained under direct imperial rule from Constantinople. In this shrunken form, the empire was more Greek than Roman. (In its later phases it is more commonly called 'Byzantine' than Roman, after the former name of Constantinople, Byzantium.) The emperor ruled through Greek-speaking civil servants; the great cities of the eastern Mediterranean, Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt, were centres of Greek culture and sent members of local elites into the imperial service.

Another and a deeper change had taken place. The empire had become Christian, not just by formal decree of the ruler but by conversion at different levels. The majority of

the population was Christian, although pagan philosophers taught in the school of Athens until the sixth century, Jewish communities lived in the cities, and memories of the pagan gods still haunted the temples turned into churches. Christianity gave a new dimension to the loyalty felt towards the emperor and a new framework of unity for the local cultures of those he ruled. Christian ideas and images were expressed in the literary languages of the various regions of the empire as well as in the Greek of the cities: Armenian in eastern Anatolia, Syriac in Syria, Coptic in Egypt. Tombs of saints and other places of pilgrimage might preserve, in a Christian form, the immemorial beliefs and practices of a region.

The self-governing institutions of the Greek cities had disappeared with the expansion of the imperial bureaucracy, but bishops could provide local leadership. When the emperor left Rome, the bishop of the city, the Pope, could exercise authority in a way impossible for the patriarchs and bishops in the eastern Roman cities; they were closely linked with the imperial government, but they

could still express local feelings and defend local interests. The hermit or miracle-working saint, too, living on the edge of the city or settled land in Anatolia or Syria, could act as arbiter of disputes or spokesman of the local population, and the monk in the Egyptian desert gave an example of a society differing from that of the secular urban world. Beside the official Orthodox Church, there grew up others which differed from it in doctrine and practice and which gave expression to the loyalties and opposition to central authority of those whose language was other than Greek.

To the east of the Byzantine Empire, across the Euphrates river, lay another great empire, that of the Sassanians (or Sassanids), whose rule extended over what are now Iran and Iraq, and stretched into central Asia. The land now called Iran or Persia contained a number of regions of high culture and ancient cities inhabited by different ethnic groups, divided from each other by steppes or deserts, with no great rivers to give them easy communications. From time to time, they had been united by strong and lasting

dynasties; the latest was that of the Sassanians, whose original power lay among the Persian-speaking peoples of southern Iran. Theirs was a family state ruled through a hierarchy of officials, and they tried to provide a solid basis of unity and loyalty by reviving the ancient religion of Iran, traditionally associated with the teacher, Zoroaster. For this religion, the universe was a battle-ground, beneath the Supreme God, between good and evil spirits; the good would win, but men and women of virtue and ritual purity could hasten the victory.

After Alexander the Great conquered Iran in 34—33 BC and drew it into closer ties with the eastern Mediterranean world, ideas from the Greek world moved eastwards, while those of a teacher from Iraq, Mani, who tried to incorporate all prophets and teachers into a single religious system (known as Manichaeism: a trend of thought combining ideas from both religious and philosophical creeds, founded by Mani, a Persian philosopher) moved westwards. Under the Sasanians, the teaching associated with Zoroaster was revived in a philosophical form, with

more emphasis on the dualism of good and evil, and with a priesthood and formal worship; this is known as Mazdaism or Zoroastrianism. As a state Church, Mazdaism supported the power of the ruler, regarded as a just king who preserved harmony between the different classes of society.

The Sassanian capital lay not in the plateaus of Iran but in the fertile and populous area of central Iraq, watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Besides Zoroastrians and followers of Mani, Iraq had Christians of the Nestorian Church, who were important in the service of the state. This area was also a refuge for pagan philosophers and medical scientists from the Greek cities of the Mediterranean world. Various forms of the Persian language were widespread; the written form used at the time is known as Pahlavi. Widespread too was Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Arabic and current throughout the Arab East and other countries at the time; one of its forms is known as Syriac.

The two empires included the main regions of settled life

and high culture in the western half of the world, but further south, on either side of the Red Sea, lay two other societies with traditions of organized power and culture maintained by agriculture and by trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. One was Ethiopia, an ancient kingdom With Christianity in its Coptic form as the official religion. The other was Yemen in south-western Arabia, a land of fertile mountain valleys and a point of transit for long-distance trade. At a certain stage its small local states had been incorporated in a larger kingdom, which had grown weak when trade declined in the early Christian era but revived later. Yemen had its own language, different from Arabic which was spoken elsewhere in Arabia, and its own religion: a multiplicity of gods were served by priests in temples which were places of pilgrimage, votive offerings and private, but not communal, prayer, and also centres of great estates. In later centuries Christian influences had come down from Syria on the trade-routes or across the sea from Ethiopia. In the sixth century, a centre of Christianity had been destroyed by a king attracted to Judaism, but invasions from Ethiopia

had restored some Christian influence there.

Between the great empires of the north and the kingdoms of the Red Sea lay lands of a different kind. The greater part of the Arabian peninsula was steppe or desert, with isolated oases having enough water for regular cultivation. The inhabitants spoke various dialects of Arabic and followed different ways of life. Some of them were nomads who pastured camels, sheep or goats by using the scanty water resources of the desert; these have traditionally been known as 'bedouins'. Some were settled cultivators tending their grain or palm trees in the oases, or traders and craftsmen in small market towns; some combined more than one way of life. The balance between nomadic and sedentary peoples was precarious. Although they were a minority of the population, it was the camel-nomads, mobile and carrying arms, who, together with merchant groups in the town dominated the cultivators and craftsmen. Their ethos of courage, hospitality, loyalty to family, and pride of ancestry were also dominant. They were not controlled by a stable power of coercion, but were

led by belonging to families around which there gathered more or less lasting groups of supporters, expressing their cohesion and loyalty in the idiom of common ancestry; such groups are usually called tribes.

The power of tribal leaders was exercised from oases, where they had close links with merchants who organized trade through the territory controlled by the tribe. In the oases, however, other families were able to establish a different kind of power through the force of religion. The religion of pastoralists and cultivators seems to have had no clear shape. Local gods, identified with objects in the sky, were thought to be embodied in stones, trees and other natural things; good and evil spirits were believed to roam the world in the shape of animals; soothsayers claimed to speak with the tongue of some supernatural wisdom. It has been suggested, on the basis of modern practice in southern Arabia, that gods were thought of as dwelling in a sanctuary, a *haram*, a place or town set apart from tribal conflict, serving as a centre of pilgrimage, sacrifice, meeting and arbitration, and watched over by a family

nder the protection of a neighbouring tribe. Such a family could obtain power or influence by making skilful use of its religious prestige, its role as arbiter of tribal disputes, and its opportunities for trade.

Throughout this Near Eastern world, much was changing in the sixth and early seventh centuries. The Byzantine and Sassanian Empires were engaged in long wars, which lasted with intervals from 540 to 629. They were mainly fought in Syria and Iraq; for a moment, the Sasanian armies ruled as far as the Mediterranean, occupying the great cities of Antioch and Alexandria as well as the holy city of Jerusalem, but in the 620s they were driven back by the Emperor Heraclius. For a time, too, Sasanian rule extended to south-western Arabia, where the kingdom of Yemen had lost much of its former power because of invasions from Ethiopia and a decline in agriculture. The settled societies ruled by the empires were full of questionings about the meaning of life and the way it should be lived, expressed in the idioms of the great religions.

The power and influence of the empires touched parts of the Arabian peninsula, and for many centuries Arab pastoral nomads from the north and centre of the peninsula had been moving into the countryside of the so-often called **Fertile Crescent**: the interior of **Syria**, the land lying west of the Euphrates in **lower Iraq**, and the region between Euphrates and Tigris in **Upper Iraq** (the **Jazira**) were largely **Arab** in population. They shared their ethos and forms of social organization. Some of the chiefs exercised leadership from oasis towns and were used by the governments to keep other nomads away from the settled lands and to collect taxes. They were able, therefore, to create more stable political units, like that of the Lakhmids with its capital at Hira, in a region where the Sasanians did not exercise direct control, and that of the **Ghassanids** in a similar region of the Byzantine Empire. The people of these states acquired political and military knowledge, and were open to ideas and beliefs coming from the imperial lands; Hira was a Christian centre. From these states, from Yemen, and also by the passage of traders along the trade-

routes, there came into Arabia some knowledge of the outside world and its culture, and some settlers from it. There were, for example, Christian monks and converts in central Arabia.

Questions & Exercises

1) Which two main powers dominated the world before Ibn Khaldun was born? Describe their nature and orientation.

2) Which power replaced the Romans? What was their capital called? Describe the new power's system and its cultural trend.

3) Describe the religious practice in those two empires at that time.

4) Was there another power to the east of the Euphrates at that time? Which one ? Describe its orientation and culture.

5) Summarize paragraph 2 in this section and comment on its ideas in your own language.

6) Translate the last paragraph in this section and comment on its ideas in your own language.

7) How was the life of Arabs before Islam?

8) Who were the Sassanians (or Sassanids)? Where did

they live?

9) What are the major ideas of Zoroaster? Describe his school of thought in a few sentences.

10) What is meant by 'Pahlavi'?

11) What is meant by 'the two empires' in paragraph 8 in this section?

12) What was the culture of the Arabian Peninsula like at that time? Describe the way of life and doctrine of its people then.

13) Describe the 'Fertile Crescent' as it was at that time in detail? What lands (and people) does it include now? When was it partitioned into several entities, and by whom?

I. 3 The Language of Poetry in Arab Culture

(Just for Reading)

A sense of cultural identity also seems to have been growing among the pastoral tribesmen, shown in the emergence of a common poetic language out of the dialects of Arabic. This was a formal language, with refinements of grammar and vocabulary, which evolved gradually,

perhaps by the elaboration of one particular dialect, or perhaps by a conflation of several. It was used by poets from different tribal groups or oasis towns. Their poetry may have developed out of the use of rhythmic, elevated and rhymed language for incantations or magical spells, but that which has come down to us is in no sense primitive. It is the product of a long cumulative tradition, in which not only tribal gatherings and market towns, but the courts of Arab dynasties on the fringes of the great empires played a part, in particular that of Hira on the Euphrates, open as it was to Christian and Mazdaan influences.

The poetic conventions which emerged from this tradition were elaborate. The poetic form most highly valued was the ode or *qasida*, a poem up to 100 lines, written in one of a number of accepted metres and with single rhyme running through it. Each line consisted of two hemistiches: the rhyme was carried in both of them in the first line, but only in the second in the rest. In general, each line was a unit of meaning and total enjambment was rare; but this did not prevent continuity of feeling from one line to another,

and throughout the poem.

Poetry was not written down, although it could have been, because writing was known in the peninsula: inscriptions in the language of southern Arabia go back for centuries. The earliest Arabic inscription, Aramaic script, can be dated to the fourth century, and later another Arabic script was evolved; apart from inscriptions, writing may well have been used in long-distance trade. Poems, however, were composed to be recited in public, either by the poet himself or by a *rawi* (reciter). This had certain implications: the sense had to be conveyed in a line, a single unit of words, of which the meaning could be grasped by listeners, and every performance was unique and different from others. The poet or *rawi* had scope for improvisation, within a framework of commonly accepted verbal forms and patterns, the use of certain words or combinations of them in order to express certain ideas or feelings. There may therefore have been no single authentic version of a poem. As they have come down to us, the versions were produced or by philologists or literary critics in the light of the

linguistic or poetic norms of their own time. In the process of doing so, they may have introduced new elements into the poems, changing the language to suit their ideas of what was correct and even forming *qasidas* by combining shorter pieces. In the 1920s, two scholars, one British and one Egyptian, built upon these undoubted facts a theory that the poems were themselves the products of a later period, but most of those who have studied the subject would now agree that in substance the poems do come from the time to which they have traditionally been ascribed.

Among scholars and critics of a later period, it was common to refer to poems, among the mass of those which have survived, as supreme of the ancient Arabian poetry. These came to be called the *mualla qat* or 'suspended poems', a name of which the origin and meaning are obscure; the poets who wrote them — Labid, Zuhayr, Imru'l-Qays and some half-dozen others — were regarded as the great masters of the art. It is customary to call the poetry of this time the *diwan* of the Arabs, or the

expression of their collective memory, but the strong imprint of the personality of the individual poet was also there.

Later critics and scholars were accustomed to distinguish three elements of *qasida*, but this was to formalize a practice which was loose and varied. The poem tended to begin with the evocation of a place where the poet once had been, which could also be an evocation of a lost love; the mood was not by any means erotic so much as the commemoration of the transience of human life:

The abodes are deserted, the places where we halted and those where we camped, in Mina; Ghawl and Rijan are both abandoned. In the flood-courses of Rayyan the riverbeds are naked and worn smooth, as writing is preserved on stone. The blackened dung lies undisturbed since those who stayed there departed: long years have passed over it, years of holy and ordinary months. Springs which the stars have caused to flow have fed them, and they have been nourished by the waters of thunder-clouds: heavy downpours and light showers, the clouds of night, those that cover the sky at morning, and the evening clouds whose voices answer each other.

After this, there may come a journey on camel-back, in which the poet speaks of the camel, the countryside and the hunting of animals, and, by implication, of the recovery of his strength and confidence when tested against the forces of nature. The poem may culminate in praise of the poet's tribe:

A house with a high roof has been built for us, and young and old alike try to reach its height. . . They are those who fight when the tribe is in distress, its knights and its arbiters. They are like the spring for those who seek their help, or for widows whose year of mourning is long. They are such a tribe, envy cannot harm them and none of their people are so unworthy as to go with the enemy.

Beneath the praise and boasting, however, can sometimes be heard another note, that of the limits of human strength in the face of all-powerful nature:

I am tired of the burdens of life; make no mistake, whoever lives to fourscore years grows tired. I know what is happening today and what happened yesterday, but I cannot tell what tomorrow will bring. I have seen the Fates stamp like a camel in the dark;

those they touch they kill, and those they miss live on to grow old.

Questions & Exercises

1) Describe the Arabic language before Islam.

2) What was the role of Arabic poetry in pre-Islamic culture?

3) Describe the poetic form and content of Arabic *qassida* in that period.

4) How far does writing go back in time, do you believe, before the appearance of Islam? Discuss in class with your tutor and colleagues.

5) What were the muallaqat in Arabic poetry? Who were the masters of this art at that time?

6) Which form/dialect of Arabic was used before the appearance of Islam?

7) How close are those dialects in form and structure, do you think? Discuss with your tutor and colleagues.

Chapter II: Prophet Muhammad And The Appearance of Islam

II. 1 Introduction

By the early seventh century, there existed a combination of a settled world which had lost something of its strength and assurance, and another world on its frontiers which was in closer contact with its northern neighbours and opening itself to their cultures. The decisive meeting between the two took place in the middle years of that century. A new political order was created which included the whole of the Arabian peninsula, the whole of the Sasanian (Sassanid) lands, and the Syrian and Egyptian provinces of the Byzantine Empire; old frontiers were erased and new ones created. In this new world order, the ruling group was formed not by the peoples of the empires but by Arabs from western Arabia and, to a great extent, from Mecca.

Before the end of the seventh century, this Arab ruling

group identifying its new order with a revelation given by God to Muhammad, a citizen of Mecca, in the form of a holy book, the Qur'an: a revelation which completed those given to earlier prophets or messengers of God and created a new religion, Islam, separate from Judaism and Christianity. There is room for scholarly discussion about the way in which these beliefs developed. The Arabic sources which narrate the life of Muhammad and the formation of a community around him are later in date; the first biographer whose work we know did not write until more than a century after Muhammad's death. Sources written in other languages fully attest to the conquest of an empire by the Arabs, but what they say about the mission of Muhammad is different from what the Muslim tradition says - which needs to be studied and discussed. On the other hand, there seems little reason to doubt that the Qur'an is substantially a document of seventh-century Arabia, although it may have taken some time to assume its definitive literary form. Moreover, some westerners believe that there elements in the traditional biographies and histories which are not likely to have been invented. They

claim that such writings reflect later attempts to fit Muhammad into the Near Eastern pattern of a holy man, and the Arabian pattern of a man of noble descent; they reflect also the doctrinal controversies of the time and place where they were composed — Iraq in the eighth century. Nevertheless, they contain facts about Muhammad's life, his family and friends which could not have been invented. It seems best therefore to keep to the traditional account of the origins of Islam. To do so has an advantage: since that account, and the text of the Qur'an, have remained living without substantial change in the minds and nations of believers in the religion of Islam, to follow it makes it able to understand their view of history and of what human life should be.

Questions & Exercises

1) What represents the new power initiating a new world order? Explain in detail.

2) What was the initial reaction of Western thinkers to the new message to humanity?

II. 2 First Signs of Prophecy

The most obscure part of the life of Muhammad, as some biographers see it, is the early one. They tell us that he was born in Mecca, a town in Arabia, perhaps in or near the year 570. His family belonged to the tribe of *Quraysh*, although not to its most powerful part. Members of the tribe were traders, who had agreements with pastoral tribes around Mecca and also relations with Syria as well as south-western Arabia. They were also said to have had a connection with the sanctuary of the town, the Ka'ba, where the images of local gods were kept. Muhammad married Khadija, a widow engaged in trade, and looked after her business for her. Various anecdotes recorded by those who later wrote his life portray a world waiting for a guide and a man searching for a vocation. A seeker after God expresses his wish to be taught:

'0 God, if I knew how you wished to be worshipped I would so worship you, but I do not know'.

Jewish rabbis, Christian monks and Arab soothsayers predict the coming of a prophet: a monk, met by Muhammad on a trading journey to southern Syria,

'looked at his back and saw the seal of prophet-hood between his shoulders'. Natural objects saluted him: ***'Not a stone or tree that he passed but would say, "Peace unto you, O apostle of God!"'.***

He became a solitary wanderer among the rocks, and then one day, perhaps when he was about forty years old, something happened: some contact with the supernatural, known to later generations as the Night of Power or Destiny (*laylat-l Qadre*). In one version, an angel, seen in the form of a man on the horizon, called to him to become the messenger of God; in another, he heard the angel's voice summoning him to recite. He asked, 'What shall I recite?' and the voice said:

Recite: in the name of thy Lord who created,
created man of a blood-clot.
Recite: and thy Lord is the most bountiful,
who taught by the pen,
taught man what he knew not.
No, indeed: surely man waxes insolent,
for he thinks himself self-sufficient.
Surely unto thy Lord is the returning.

At this point, there occurred an event known in the lives of other claimants to supernatural power: the claim is accepted by some to whom it is told, and this recognition confirms it in the mind of him who has made it. Those who responded were few in number, and included his wife Khadija:

'Rejoice, 0 son of my uncle, and be of good heart. By Him in whose hand is Khadija's soul, I hope that thou wilt be the prophet of His people'.

Questions & Exercises

1) How did the first signs of prophet Muhammad's prophecy
begin to appear?

2) Summarize the last paragraph in this section in your own English.

3) What was the role of Khadija in recognizing the prophet's message to humanity?


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PART II: Ways Of Life And Thought In The Arab World


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Chapter III: Population And The Countryside

III. 1 Introduction

Even at their strongest and most successful, understandings between the imperial powers and local nationalists would have expressed only a limited confluence of interests, and by the 1930s there were taking place changes in Arab societies which would in due course alter the nature of the political process.

Wherever it is possible to estimate it, there was a rapid increase of population. It was perhaps greatest, and is easiest to estimate reliably in Egypt, where population increased from 11.7 millions in 1917 to 15.9 in 1937: an annual increase of 11 per thousand. On a rough guess, the total population of the Arab countries was of the order of 60 millions by 1914. A small part of the growth was due to immigration: Europeans in Morocco and Libya, 'Jews' in Palestine, Armenian refugees from Turkey during and after

the First World War in Syria and Lebanon. This was counterbalanced by emigration: Syrians and Lebanese going to west Africa and Latin America (but no longer to the United States in large numbers, as they had done before 1914, because of the new American immigration laws); Algerian workers going temporarily to France. The main increase was natural, however. The birthrate does not appear to have decreased, except perhaps among sections of the bourgeoisie practising birth control, and having expectations of a rising standard of living. For most people, to have children, and male children in particular, was both unavoidable (since effective means of birth control were not generally known) and a source of pride; and the pride expressed an interest, for children could work in the fields from an early age and to have children was a guarantee, in a society where the expectation of life was low and there was no national welfare system, that some of them would survive to look after their parents in old age. It was above all a decline in the death rate, because of control of epidemics and better medical care, which was responsible for the growth of population. This was true of all parts of

society, but particularly significant in the cities, where for the first time epidemics did not play their historic role of devastating the urban masses from time to time.

Partly as a result of the growth in population, but also for other reasons, the balance between different sectors of society also changed. The 1920s and 1930s were the period when nomadic pastoralists virtually disappeared as an important factor in Arab society. The coming of the railway and the motor car has changed the activity on which the long-distance pastoral economy depended: the rearing of camels for transport. Even in areas where pasturage was still the best or the only use for sparse vegetation and scarce water, the freedom of movement of the bedouins was restricted by the use of armed forces enlisted from the nomads themselves. The market for sheep still existed, but in the sheep-rearing districts on the slopes of mountains or on the margins of the steppe, the extension of control by governments and changes in urban demand were causing mainly nomadic and pastoral groups to move ... er to becoming sedentary cultivators; this was

happening, for example, in the Jazira district lying between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Questions & Exercises

1) What caused the increase of population in the Arab World? Mention more than one factor.

2) How was such increase of population in the Arab World counterbalanced?

3) What is the difference between 'immigration' and 'emigration'? Discuss in class.

4) Summarize paragraph 2 in this section in your own language.

5) How and why did certain aspects of life change in the Arab World after 1930?

III. 2 Great Political & Social Changes

It was in this period that, perhaps for the last time, the armed force of the nomads was used in the political process. When the **Sharif Husayn** revolted against the Turks, his first forces were drawn from the bedouins of

western Arabia, but any effective military action in the later stages of the movement came from officers or conscripts who had served in the Ottoman army. The forces with which 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Sa'ud conquered most of Arabia were also drawn from bedouins animated by a national doctrine, but the man who led them belonged to an urban family, and an essential part of his policy was to persuade the bedouin to settle. In Iraq, a conflict between groups of urban politicians in the 1930s could still be fought by means of stirring tribes in the Euphrates valley to revolt, but the governor was able to use the new method of aerial bombardment against them.

In the settled countryside, the changes were not due, as they were in pastoral areas, to a weakening of the economic basis. In most countries, the area of cultivation expanded; in some of them — Morocco and Algeria, Egypt and the Sudan, and Iraq — irrigation was extended. In Egypt, it is true, that most fertile land had already been brought under cultivation, an expansion was into more marginal land, but this was not true of most the other

countries, and where capital was available it was possible to increase the yield of land. Even an expanded area of cultivation could no longer support the rural population in some countries. Not only was the population growing by natural increase, but the most productive land no longer needed so much labour. Large landowners were able to obtain capital resources and use them for mechanization, and this meant that less labour was needed. In some places (e.g. Morocco and Palestine), the import of capital was linked with the settlement of foreign workers on the land.

In a number of countries, therefore, there took place a process of polarization in the countryside. On one side, there were large estates of fertile and irrigated land producing for export (cotton, cereals, wine, olive oil, oranges and dates), using tractors and fertilizers where appropriate, and cultivated by wage-labourers (crop-sharing was now becoming somewhat less common); a large proportion of them were owned by foreign companies or individuals, and in Palestine, and to a lesser extent in the Maghrib, the labour also was provided by immigrants. On

the other side were smallholdings or land owned communally by a village, usually less fertile and less well watered, where small indigenous farmers with no capital resources and no access to credit produced cereals, fruit or vegetables by less advanced methods, either for consumption or for a local market, and where the increase of population was causing a decline in the ratio of land to labour and in per-capita income. The situation of these farmers was made worse by the system of inheritance, which fragmented smallholdings into even smaller ones. In the 1930s, it was harmed also by the world economic crisis, which led to a lowering of prices of agricultural produce. This touched all cultivators, but those who were already in a weak position were worst affected; governments or banks stepped in to rescue the large landowners who had political influence or whose production was linked to the international economy.

The surplus population of the countryside moved into the cities. This had always happened, but now it took place faster and on a larger scale and with different results. In

previous ages, villages moving into the town had replenished an urban population ravaged by epidemics. Now the rural immigrants came to swell an urban population which was itself increasing because of improvements in public health. The cities, and in particular those where the possibility of employment was highest, grew more rapidly than the country as a whole; the proportion of the population living in large cities was greater than it had been. Cairo grew from a city of 100,000 in 1917 to one of 1,300,000 in 1937. In 1900, less than 1.2 per cent of the total population of Egypt had lived in cities of more than 20,000; by 1937 the figure was more than 2.5 per cent. Similarly, in Palestine, the Arab population of the five largest towns more than doubled in twenty years. In the mixed cities of the Maghrib, too, the Arab element increased rapidly.

Questions & Exercises

1) How did the Arab Great Revolution against the Turks influence the Bedouin life?

2) How was the fertile land in some Arab countries brought

under cultivation?

3) Why was less labour needed in agriculture at that time?

4) How did the process of polarization take place in the countryside?

5) What was the role of governments in rescuing landowners affected by the world economic crisis in the 1930s?"

6) Why were the cities growing more rapidly than the country at that time?

III. 3 Life In The New Cities

The result was a change in the nature and form of cities. Certain changes which had begun before 1914 were carried further after the war. Outside the *madina* (city) there grew up new bourgeois quarters, not only of villas for the rich, but apartment blocks for the growing middle classes, government officials, professional men, and rural notables moving in from the countryside. In some places they were planned, in others they grew haphazardly at the cost of the destruction of the old. The most careful planning was in

Morocco, where a French resident-general with taste, Lyautey, placed the new Fez some distance away from the old walled city. His purpose was to preserve the life of the old city, but what happened in the end was not quite what he had planned. Families of wealth and standing began to move out of their old houses in the *madina* for the greater convenience of the new quarters, and their place was taken by rural immigrants and the poor; hence a certain degradation in the physical appearance and life of the *madina*.

Not all the immigrants found shelter in the *madina*. There were also new popular quarters. Most of those who settled in them were Arabs, or, in the Maghrib, Berbers, but there were others also: *petits blancs* in Algeria drifting away from the land which they had not the capital to develop, Armenian refugees from Turkey in Beirut and Aleppo, 'Jewish' settlers in Palestine. Some of these quarters grew up on the outskirts of cities, where workshops and factories offered employment. In Cairo, the expansion of bourgeois quarters westwards to the Nile and across it was balanced

by an expansion of poorer quarters to the north, where more than a third of the population lived by 1937; in Casablanca, the poor quarters grew up all around the city, but especially in the industrial zones. In these parts, but also in others, there were villages with houses made of reeds or of tin cans appearing wherever there was an empty space.

In cities with a large foreign population, European and indigenous quarters tended to be separate, although they might be near each other. In Casablanca, which in this period changed from being a small port to the largest city in the Maghrib, there was a European and beyond it there was a new Muslim city with the characteristics of a *madina*: *souqs*, mosques, a palace for the ruler, villas for the bourgeoisie and popular dwellings. In the Middle Eastern city, the separation was less complete, particularly in Syria and Lebanon where the bourgeoisie was mainly indigenous and the foreign population small; but in Palestine a sharp line divided Arab from 'Jewish' quarters, and a wholly Jewish city, Tel Aviv, grew up side by side

with Arab *Yafa* (Java).

Questions & Exercises

1) How did the growing of cities influence social and economic life in them?
2) Summarize paragraph 1 in this section in your own language and discuss its content.
3) What is meant by *petits blancs* (a French phrase) in paragraph 2 of this section? What were the consequences of their immigration?
4) Who paved the way for 'Jewish' settlers to move into Palestine and why? What are the consequences of such terrorist movement?
5) How was life in the cities with a large foreign population? Discuss in detail with your tutor and colleagues.

III. 4 Social Consequences of Migration

Rural migrants tended to settle among their own people and, at least in the first phase, to preserve their own social

ways. They would leave their families behind in the village to begin with, and, if they prospered enough to bring them, their life in the city would be a continuation or reconstruction of that which they had left. They brought the life of the Nile delta into Cairo, the Tigris valley into Baghdad, the Kabyle mountains into Algiers, the Shawiya and Anti-Atlas into Casablanca.

In the end, however, they would be drawn into a way of life which was different not only from that of the village but from that of the *madina*, as well. Going to shops was not quite the same as going to the *souq*, although there was still a preference for small shops where a personal relationship was possible; restaurants, cafés and cinemas offered new kinds of recreation and new places for meeting; women could go out more freely, and the younger generation of educated Muslim women began to go unveiled, or very lightly covered. The amenities of domestic life were greater. Modern water and drainage systems, electricity and telephones spread in the 1920s; gas had come earlier. Means of transport changed. A Belgian

company had laid down tramways in some of the coastal cities by the end of the nineteenth century, and then the motor car appeared; the first one was seen in the streets of Cairo in 1903, in most other cities later.

By the 1930s, private cars, buses and taxis were common, and the horse-drawn carriage had virtually disappeared in all except the smaller provincial towns. Motor traffic demanded better roads and bridges, and these in their turn made it possible to enlarge the area of cities: Baghdad extended for miles along the banks of the Tigris; Cairo spread to the two islands in the Nile, Rawda and Gazira, and across to the west bank of the river.

These means of transport integrated the urban population in new ways. Men and women no longer lived entirely within a quarter. They might live a long way from their work; the extended family might be spread across a city; people of one ethnic origin or religious community might live in the same quarters as those of others; the range of marriage choices might be extended. Invisible lines of division still

existed, however; intermarriage across the lines of religious communities remained difficult and rare; in cities under foreign rule barriers were created not only by religious and national difference, but by the consciousness of power and importance. In some ways, the barriers were higher than before: as European communities grew, the greater was the possibility for them to lead a separate life, similar to that in the home country; if more Arabs spoke French or English, few Europeans knew Arabic or had any concern for Islamic culture. Many Arab students returning from study abroad brought with them foreign wives, who were not always fully accepted in either community.

Just as the bourgeois need not live within his own quarter, so he was no longer as limited to his city as he had been. The changes in transportation linked city to city, country to country, in new ways. The railway network, which already existed in 1914, was extended further in some countries; in most, good roads for the first time connected the main cities. The most spectacular change was the conquest of the desert by the motor car. In the 1920s, two Australian

brothers whom the fortunes of war had brought to the Middle East started a regular service by taxi, and later by coach, from the Mediterranean coast by way of Damascus or Jerusalem to Baghdad; the journey from Iraq to Syria, which had taken a month before the war, could now be done in less than a day. A student from northern Iraq, who in the early 1920s had travelled to the American University of Beirut by way of India, could now go there overland. In the same way, lorries and coaches could cross the Sahara from the Mediterranean coast.

Contacts were not only wider than they had been, but they could take place at a deeper level. New media of expression were creating a universe of discourse which united educated Arabs more fully than the pilgrimage and the travels of scholars in search of learning had been able to do. Newspapers multiplied, and those of Cairo were read outside Egypt; the older cultural periodicals of Egypt continued, and new ones grew up, in particular literary ones such as *al-Risala* and *al-Thaqafa* which published the work of poets and critics. The publishing houses of Cairo

and Beirut produced textbooks for the increasing numbers of students, and also poetry, novels and works of popular science and history, which circulated wherever Arabic was read.

By 1914 there were already cinemas in Cairo and some other cities; in 1915 the first authentic Egyptian film was made, and appropriately it was based on the first authentic Egyptian novel, Zaynab. In 1932, the first 'talkie' was produced in Egypt, and by 1939, Egyptian films were shown all over the Arab world. By that time, too, there were local radio stations broadcasting talks, music and news, and some of the European countries were broadcasting to the Arab world, in competition with each other. Travel, education and the new media all helped to create a shared world of taste and ideas. The phenomenon of bilingualism was common, at least in the countries on the Mediterranean coast; French and English were used in business and in the home; among women educated in French convent schools, French might virtually replace Arabic as the mother tongue. The news of the world could be gathered from foreign newspapers or broadcasts;

intellectuals and scientists needed to read more in English or French than in Arabic; the habit of going to Europe for summer holidays spread, particularly among rich Egyptians who might spend several months there; Algerians, Egyptians and Palestinians got used to seeing and meeting European or American tourists. Such movements and contacts led to changes in tastes and attitudes, not always easy to define: different ways of furnishing a room, hanging pictures on walls, eating at table, entertaining friends; different modes of dressing, particularly for women whose fashions reflected those of Paris. There were different recreations: large cities had race courses, and in a sense this was a new form of enjoying an old sport, but tennis, a bourgeois sport, and football, enjoyed by all and played by many, were newcomers.

The example of Europe and the new media also made for changes in artistic expression. The visual arts on the whole were in an intermediate phase between old and new. There was a decline in standards of craftsmanship, both because of competition from mass-produced foreign goods, and for

internal reasons: the use of imported raw materials and the need to cater to new tastes, including those of tourists. Some painters and sculptors began working in a western style, but without producing much of great interest to the outside world; there were virtually no art galleries where tastes could be formed, and picture books were not so common as they were later to become. The large architectural commissions for government buildings were given for the most part to British or French architects, some of whom (particularly the French in the Maghrib) worked in an 'oriental' style which could be pleasing. Some Arab architects, trained abroad, also began to build villas of Mediterranean style, art nouveau mansions in Garden City in Cairo, and the first buildings of what was then the 'modern' school.

The first gramophone records of Arabic music were made in Egypt very early in the century, and the exigencies of broadcasting and of the musical film gradually brought about changes in musical conventions: from the improvised to the written and rehearsed performance, from the

performer taking inspiration from an audience which applauds and encourages, to the silence of the studio. Singers performed to the accompaniment of orchestras which combined western with traditional instruments; some of the compositions they sang had become, by the 1930s, nearer to Italian or French café music than to traditional music. The older styles continued to exist, however: there were attempts to study them in Cairo, Tunis and Baghdad, in addition to other cities.

Questions & Exercises

1) How was the rural migrants in the cities they immigrated to?

2) Summarize paragraph 2 in this section in your own English.

3) How did life change in the 1930s? Describe in some detail.

4) Describe the barriers between Arabs and foreign settlers/migrants in this period in the Arab World.

5) Describe the socio-economic changes in the Arab World after 1914.

6) How did newspapers and other media influence the relationships among Arabs in their different countries?

7) When was the first authentic Egyptian film made? What was it based on?

8) Describe the results of contacting the Western way of life.

Chapter IV: The Culture Of Nationalism

IV. 1 Introduction

It was in literature that the most successful fusion of western and indigenous elements took place. Newspapers, radio and films spread a modern and simplified version of literary Arabic throughout the Arab world; thanks to them, Egyptian voices and intonations became familiar everywhere. Three academies, in Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo, were founded to watch over the heritage of the language. With a few exceptions, there was no challenge to the primacy of the literary language, but writers were using it in new ways. A school of Egyptian poets born in or near the 1890s, the 'Apollo' group, used traditional metres and language, but tried to express personal feelings in a way which would give unity to a whole poem; among the best known was Zaki Abu Shadi (1892 - 1955). The influence of English and French poetry could be seen in their work and in that of a group in the next generation: Romantics,

believing that poetry should be the sincere expression of emotion, giving an attention to the natural world which was not traditional in Arabic poetry, and which became nostalgia for a lost world in the work of Lebanese poets who had emigrated to North or South America. They were Romantics too in their view of the poet as the seer who gave voice to truths received by inspiration from outside. The revolt against the past could go as far as the total rejection expressed in the writing of one of the most original of them, the Tunisian *Abul-Qasim al-Shabbi* (1909 - 34): "Everything the Arab mind has produced in all the periods of its history is monotonous and utterly lacking in poetic inspiration."

The breach with the past was shown also in the development of certain literary forms virtually unknown in the classical literature. Plays had been written in the nineteenth century, and in this period some more were written, but theatres to perform them were still rare, apart from the appearance in Egypt of Najib Rihani's theatre of humorous social comment and his creation 'Kish-Kish

Bey'. More significant was the development of the novel and short story, pre-eminently in Egypt, where a number of writers born in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth created a new medium for the analysis and criticism of society and the individual; in their stories they depicted the poverty and oppression of the poor in village and city, the struggles of the individual to be himself in a society which tried to confine him, the conflict of the generations, the disturbing effects of western ways of life and values. Among them were Mahmud Taymur (1894—1973) and Yahya Haqqi (b. 1905).

Questions & Exercises

1) How did the Western literary tradition reflect itself in new ways of expression in Arabic literature?

2) What new genres of literature were consequently developed in Arabic literature?

3) Mention some of the Arab writers who were influenced by western trends of thought and culture.

IV. 2 A New Cultural Outlook

The writer who best expressed the problems and hopes of his generation was the Egyptian Taha Husayn (1889 - 1973). He was not only the representative, but perhaps the most original of them, and the writer of one of the books most likely to survive as part of the literature of the world: his autobiography *al-Ayyam*, a narrative of how a blind boy became aware of himself and his world. His writings include novels, essays, works of history and literary criticism and an important work, *Mustaqbil al-thaqafa fi Misr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt). They show, in this period, a sustained attempt to hold in balance the three essential elements, as he sees them, of the distinctive Egyptian culture: the Arab element, and above all the classical Arabic language; the elements brought in from outside at different periods, and above all that of Greek rationalism; and the basic Egyptian element, persisting throughout history:

Three elements have formed the literary spirit of Egypt since it was arabicized. The first of them is the purely Egyptian element

which we have inherited from the ancient Egyptians . . . and which we have drawn perpetually from the land and sky of Egypt, from its Nile and its desert.. . The second element is the Arab element, which came to us through its language and religion and civilization. Whatever we do, we shall not be able to escape from it, or weaken it, or diminish its influence in our life, because it is mingled with that life in a way which has formed it and shaped its personality. Do not say that it is a foreign element . . . . The Arabic language is not a foreign language among us, it is our language, and a thousand times closer to us than the language of the ancient Egyptians . . . . As for the third element, it is the foreign element which has always influenced Egyptian life, and will always do so. It is what has come to Egypt from its contacts with the civilized peoples in the east and west . . . Greeks, Romans, and Phoenicians in ancient times, Arabs, Turks and Crusaders in the Middle Ages, Europe and America in the modern age . . . . I should like Egyptian education to be firmly based on a certain harmony between these three elements.

His assertion that Egypt was part of the world of culture formed by thought aroused most attention at the time, but perhaps his most contribution lay in his care for the Arabic language, and his demonstration that it could be used to express all the nuances of a modern mind sensibility.

He wrote also about Islam, but at least in the 1920s and 1930s, what he wrote was in the form of an imaginative recreation of the life of the Prophet, of a kind which could satisfy the emotions of ordinary people. Later he was to write in a different vein, but for the moment the unifying principle of his thought was not Islam so much as the collective identity of the Egyptian nation. In one form or another, this was to be characteristic of educated Arabs of his generation. The central theme was that of the nation; not only how it could become independent, but how it could have the strength and health to prosper in the modern world. The definition of the nation might vary: since every Arab country was facing a different problem in relation to its European rulers, there was a tendency, at least among the political leaders, to develop a separate national movement in each, and an ideology to justify it. This was particularly true of Egypt, which had had its own political destiny since the time of Muhammad Ali. In some cases, the fact of a separate existence was given legitimacy by a theory of history. Nationalist movements were revolts

against the present and the immediate past, and they could appeal to the memory of a more distant, pre-Islamic past, to which the discoveries of archaeologists and the opening of museums gave a visible reality. The discovery of the tomb of *Tutankhamen* in 1922 aroused great interest, and encouraged Egyptians to lay emphasis upon the continuity of Egyptian life from the time of the Pharaohs.

Ahmad Shawqi, who had been the poet of the Egyptian court, emerged in the 1920s as a spokesman of an Egyptian nationalism which drew inspiration and hope from the monuments of the immemorial past of Egypt. In one of his poems, written for the unveiling of a monument in a public garden in Cairo, he portrays the Sphinx as looking down unchanged on the whole of Egyptian history:

Speak! and perhaps your speech will guide us. Inform us, and perhaps what you tell us will console us. Have you not seen Pharaoh in his might, claiming descent from the sun and moon, giving shade to the civilization of our ancestors, the high edifices, the great relics? . . . You have seen Caesar in his tyranny over us, making us slaves, his men driving us before them as one

drives donkeys, and then defeated by a small band of noble conquerors . . . [the Sphinx speaks:] I have preserved for you something that will strengthen you, for nothing preserves sweetness like stone. The morning of hope wipes out the darkness of despair, now is the long-awaited daybreak.

Deeply rooted in such movements, whether it was explicit or not, was an Arab element. Since the aim of the nationalist movements was to create an autonomous and flourishing modern society, the revival of the Arabic language as a medium of modern expression and a bond of unity was a central theme.

For the same reason, there was inevitably an Islamic element in nationalism. It tended to be implicit and submerged among the educated classes in this period, both because the separation of religion from political life seemed to be a condition of successful national life in the modern world, and because in some of the eastern Arab countries such as the Fertile Crescent entities (apart from the colonial intervention in Lebanon) and Egypt, Muslims and Christians lived together, and the emphasis was

therefore on their common national bonds.

Questions & Exercises

1) Summarize the first paragraph in this section and comment on its ideas. Discuss in class with your tutor & colleagues.

2) Comment on Taha Husayn's "three basic elements" of modern Arab culture. Discuss in class.

3) How did Taha Husayn relate present-day Egyptian culture to that of the Pharaohs? Discuss.

4) How would you appreciate Ahmad Shawqi's ideology concerning nationalism in Egypt? Comment & discuss.

IV. 3 Nationalism In Arab Culture

The idea that a group of people form a nation, and that the nation should be independent, is a simple one, too simple to be able by itself to provide guidance for the way in which social life should be organized. In this period, however, it served as a focus for a cluster of other ideas. In general, the nationalism of this period was secularist,

believing in a bond which could embrace people of different schools or faiths, and a policy based upon the interests of state and society, and it was constitutionalist, holding that the will of the nation should be expressed by elected governments responsible to elected assemblies. It placed great emphasis on the need for popular education, which would enable the nation to participate more fully in its collective life. It stood for the development of national industries, since industrialization seemed to be the source of strength.

The idea of Europe as the exemplar of modern civilization, which had animated the reforming governments of the previous century, was powerful in these national movements. To be independent was to be accepted by European states on a level of equality, to have the Capitulations, the legal privileges of foreign citizens, abolished, to be admitted to the League of Nations. To be modern was to have a political and social life similar to those of the countries of western Europe.

Another component of this cluster of ideas deserves more than a passing mention. Nationalism gave an impetus to the movement for the emancipation of women. The opening of schools for girls, by governments and foreign missions, had given a stimulus to this during the second half of the nineteenth century; travel, the European press and the example of European women all encouraged it; it found a theoretical justification in the writings of a few writers connected with the Islamic reform movement (but by no means all of them).

The autobiography of a member of a prominent Sunni Muslim family of Beirut conveys some idea of the ferment of change. Born in the last years of the nineteenth century, brought up in the warm certainties of a traditional family life, and wearing the veil in public until her twenties, 'Anbara Salam received a full modern education. Her mother and grandmother were literate and read books of religion and history, and she herself was sent to school: for a time to a Christian school, from which she kept a lasting memory of the humility and sweetness of the nuns, then to

one established by a Muslim benevolent association. She also took lessons in Arabic from one of the leading scholars of the day. A visit to Cairo in 1912 revealed some of the marvels of modern civilization: electric lights, lifts, automobiles, the cinema, theatres with special places for women. Before she was out of her teens, she had begun to write in the press, to speak at women's meetings, and to have a new idea of personal independence: she refused to be betrothed to a relation at an early age, and decided she could not marry someone whom she did not already know. When she married, it was with a member of a prominent family of Jerusalem, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, a leader in the promotion of Arab education, with whom she shared in the life and misfortunes of the Palestinian Arabs, while playing her own part in the emancipation of Arab women.

The desire to generate all the potential strength of the nation gave a new meaning to the emancipation of women: how could the nation flourish while half its power was unused; how could it be a free society so long as there was quality of rights and duties? The excitement of

nationalist activity gave a new kind of courage. As the leading Egyptian feminist of her time, Huda Sha'rawi (1878 - 1947), arrived at the main railway station of Cairo on her return from a women's conference in Rome in 1923, she stepped on to the running-board of the train and drew back the veil from her face; it is said that the women present broke into applause and some of them copied her. Her example was followed by some of her generation, while those of the next may never have worn the veil.

By 1939, however, the changes had not gone very deep. There were more girls in schools and a few in universities, an expanding freedom of social intercourse, but no effective change in the legal status of women; some women participated in political activities, the movement of the Wafd in Egypt and resistance to British policy in Palestine, but few professions were open to them. Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine had moved furthest on this road; in some other countries, like Morocco, the Sudan and the countries of the Arabian peninsula, almost no change could be seen.

Questions & Exercises

1) How far would you agree/disagree to the concept of nationalism expressed in the first paragraph of this section? Discuss and justify.

2) How far would you accept the idea of Europe as the exemplar of modern civilization? Discuss.

3) How would you relate the emancipation of women to nationalism as explained in paragraph 3 of this section?

4) How do view the role of the Lebanese lade, 'Anbara Salam, in women emancipation? Discuss.

5) Summarize the last paragraph but one in this section and comment on the example given by Huda Sha'rawi to other women.

IV. 4 Islam & National Liberation

The old-established populations of cities, of whatever level of income, had been formed by the experience of living together in urban community. A system of customs, a shared possession of things regarded as sacred, had held them together; notables and bourgeoisie, living among

craftsmen and shopkeepers, controlled their production and acted as their protectors. The religion of the city and the countryside, although differing, had been linked by common observance of prayer, Ramadan and pilgrimage, and reverence for common places of devotion. Most urban '*ulama* belonged to one or other of the Sufi orders, whose ramifications spread throughout the countryside; even if the villagers lived by custom, they respected the shari'a in principle and might use its forms to express important agreements and common undertakings. Now, however, the two worlds of thought and practice were becoming more distant from each other. In cities of the new kind, physical separation was a sign of a deeper divorce of attitudes, tastes, habits, and faith.

By the 1930s, a large part of the educated elite was no longer living within the bounds of the *shari'a*. In the new Turkish republic, it was formally abolished and replaced by positive laws derived from European models. No Arab country, and no European power ruling Arabs, went to such lengths, but in countries affected by the reforms of the

nineteenth century, whether introduced by reforming autocrats or by foreign rulers, a duality of legal systems was by now well established. Criminal, civil, and commercial cases were decided according to European codes and nationalists, and provided an issue on which they could mobilize urban opinion.

These were movements among the educated elite, but the urban masses, and the rural population which was swelling them, still held to traditional ways of beliefs and behaviour. Prayer, fast, and pilgrimage still gave shape to the stream of days and years; the preacher in the mosque on Friday and the Sufi teacher who guarded the tomb of a saint were still those who formed and expressed public opinion on questions of the day. Sufi orders were still widespread among the masses in city and countryside, but their nature and role were changing. Under the influence of reformism and *Wahhabism*, fewer of the *'ulama* and the educated class joined them, and Sufi thought and practice were no longer held within the restraints of the high urban culture. When the government controlled the countryside firmly,

the political role of the Sufi leader was more limited than it had been, but where such control was weak or lacking he could still become the head of a political movement. During the Italian conquest of Libya, resistance in the eastern region, *Cyrenaica*, was led and directed by the heads of the *Sanusi* order.

Even within the world of popular Islam, the more activist, political version was spreading. Among Algerian workers, in France and Algeria itself, a popular movement spread in the 1930s: the *Etoile Nord-Africaine*, led by *Messali al-Hajj*, more openly nationalist than the movements of the French-educated elite, and appealing more openly to Islamic sentiment. Of more general significance was a movement in Egypt which was to serve as a prototype of similar groups in other Muslim countries.

To these had been added the influence of the West, which, in spite of its social virtues, had brought alien values, immorality, missionary activity and imperial domination. The beginning of a cure was for Muslims to return to the

true Islam, that of the Qur'an as interpreted by genuine *ijtihad*, and to try to follow its teachings in every sphere of life; Egypt should become an Islamic state based upon shari'a. This would have implications in every aspect of its life. Women should be educated and allowed to work, but some kind of social distance between them and men should be maintained; education should be based upon religion; the economy too should be reformed in the light of principles deduced from the Qur'an.

This teaching had political implications, too. Although such movements did not at first claim that they themselves should rule, they would recognize as legitimate rulers only those who acted according to the *shari'a* and were opposed to a foreign rule which threatened the *shari'a* and the community of believers. They were primarily concerned with Egypt, but their view extended over the whole Muslim world, and their first active involvement in politics came with the revolt of the Palestinian Arabs in the late 1930s. By the end of the decade, they were a political force to be reckoned with, and were spreading in the urban population

— among neither the poor nor the very highly educated, but among those in an intermediate position: craftsmen, small tradesmen, teachers and professional men who stood outside the charmed circle of the dominant elite, had been educated in Arabic rather than in English or French, and read their scriptures in a simple, literal way.

The belief of such movements that the doctrines and laws of Islam could provide the bases of society in the modern world was encouraged by the creation of a state which had such a basis: that of Saudi Arabia. The attempts of King 'Abd al-'Aziz and his *Wahhabi* supporters to maintain the predominance of the *shari'a* in its *Hanbali* form, against tribal custom on the one hand and innovations from the West on the other, was to have a greater influence at a later time, when the kingdom came to occupy a more important position in the world, but even in this period it had a certain resonance; however poor and backward, Saudi Arabia contained the holy cities of Islam.

Questions & Exercises

1) How far can the concept of social classes affect the doctrine of the believers? As indicated in the first paragraph of this section? Discuss.

2) Describe the life elite in the 1930s. Why was that, do you think?

3) Describe the role of Arab Islamic movements, such as those of Hamas and al-Jihad in occupied Palestine in national liberation.

Chapter V: The Age Of Nation-States

V. 1 Introduction

The Second World War changed the structure of power in the world. The defeat of France, the financial burdens of the war, the emergence of the USA and USSR as super-powers, and a certain change in the climate of opinion were to lead, in the next two decades, to the end of British and French rule in the Arab countries. The Suez crisis of 1956 and the Algerian war of 1954 - 62 marked the last major attempts of the two powers to reassert their position. In one place, Palestine, British withdrawal led to a defeat for the Arabs when the so-called state of 'Israel' was created. Elsewhere, the former rulers were replaced by regimes of one kind or other committed to the cluster of ideas which had gathered around that of nationalism: the development of national resources, popular education, and the emancipation of women. They had to try to carry out their policies within societies in the process of rapid change: populations were growing fast; cities were expanding, in particular the capital cities; societies were stratified in different ways;

and the new mass media — the cinema, radio, television and cassette — made possible a different kind of mobilization.

The dominant idea of the 1950s and 1960s was that of Arab nationalism, though in different ways, aspiring towards a close union of Arab countries, independence from the super-powers, and social reforms in the direction of greater equality; this idea was embodied for a time in the personality of Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, ruler of Egypt. The defeat of Egypt and Syria and Jordan in the war of 1967 with 'Israel' and its allies, however, halted the advance of this idea, and opened a period of disunity and increasing dependence on one or other of the superpowers, with the USA in the ascendant. At other levels, contacts between the Arab peoples were growing closer: the media, both old and new, transmitted ideas and images from one Arab country to another; in some of the Arab countries, the exploitation of oil resources made possible rapid economic growth, and this attracted migrants from other countries.

In the 1980s, a combination of factors added a third idea to those of nationalism and social justice as a force which might give legitimacy to a regime, but might also animate movements of opposition to it. The need of uprooted urban populations to find a solid basis for their lives, the sense of the past implicit in the idea of nationalism, an aversion from the new ideas and customs which were coming in from the western world, and the example of the Iranian revolution of 1979 all led to the rapid growth of Islamic feelings and loyalties.

Questions & Exercises

1) What factors paved the way towards nationalist movements? Discuss.

2) What halted the movement of Arab nationalism after the 1960s?

3) Why did the Arabs fail in the 1967 confrontation with the

Zionist enemy and its allies, do you think?

4) In addition to nationalism and social justice, what was the third idea that motivated parts of the Arab World to

work effectively against foreign intervention and internal troubles?

V. 2 The Second World War

The Second World War came upon an Arab world which seemed to be firmly held within the British and French imperial systems. Nationalists might hope for a more favoured position within them, but the military, economic and cultural ascendancy of England and France seemed unshakeable. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had more than a limited concern with the Arab East or the Maghrib. German and Italian power and propaganda had some influence over the younger generation, but until the war broke out a structure, so firmly based, seemed able to resist the challenge. Once more, however, war was a catalyst, bringing rapid changes in power and social life, and in the ideas and hopes of those affected by it.

For the first few months the war was a northern European one, with French armies in the Maghrib and British and

French in the Arab East on the alert but not engaged. The situation changed in 1940, when France was defeated and withdrew from the war and Italy entered it. Italian armies threatened the British position in the western desert of Egypt, and in Ethiopia on the southern frontier of the Sudan. In the early months of 1941 the German occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece aroused fears that Germany might move further eastwards, into Syria and Lebanon which were ruled by a French administration receiving its orders from France, and into Iraq, where power had fallen into the hands of a group of army officers and politicians headed by Rashid Ali al-Kaylani (1891—1965) and having some relations with Germany. In May 1941, Iraq was occupied by a British force which restored a government favourable to Britain, and in June, Syria was invaded by British and imperial forces, together with a French force formed from those who had responded to the call of General de Gaulle that France had not lost the war and Frenchmen should continue to take part in it.

From the middle of 1941, the war between European states

became a world war. The German invasion of Russia opened the possibility that Germany might advance into the Middle East through the Caucasus and Turkey, and the wish to send British and American supplies to Russia led to a joint occupation of Iran by British and Soviet armies. At the end of the year, the Japanese attack upon the American navy brought the United States into the war against Germany and Italy as well as Japan. The years 1942 - 1943 were the turning-point in the Arab East. A German army had reinforced the Italians in Libya, and in July 1942, they advanced into Egypt and stood not far from Alexandria; but the war in the desert was one of rapid movement, and before the end of the year a counterattack brought the British forces far westwards into Libya. Almost at the same time, in November, Anglo-American armies landed in the Maghrib and rapidly occupied Morocco and Algeria. The Germans fell back on their last stronghold in Tunisia, but finally abandoned it under attack from both east and west in May 1943.

The active war was now more or less ended so far as the

Arab countries were concerned, and it might have seemed to end with a reassertion of British and French predominance. All the countries which had previously been under British control remained so, and British armies were in Libya, Syria and Lebanon as well. French rule still continued formally in Syria and Lebanon and in the Maghrib, where the French army was being remade to take an active part in the last stages of the war in Europe.

In fact, however, the bases of British and French power had been shaken. The collapse of France in 1940 had weakened its position in the eyes of those it ruled; although it had emerged on the side of the victors, and with the formal status of a great power, the problems of re-creating a stable national life and restoring a damaged economy would make it more difficult to hold on to an empire that reached from Morocco to Indo-China. In Britain, the efforts of the war had led to an economic crisis which could be overcome only gradually and with help from the United States; fatigue and the consciousness of dependence strengthened the doubt whether it was possible or desirable

to rule so large an empire in the same way as before. Britain and France were the two powers whose potential strength had been made actual by the war. The United States and the Soviet Union had greater economic resources and manpower than any other states, and in the course of the war had established a presence in many parts of the world. Henceforth, they would be in a position to claim that their interests should be taken into account everywhere, and the economic dependence of Europe upon American aid gave the United States a powerful means of pressure upon its European allies.

Among the Arab peoples, the events of the war aroused hopes of a life made new. The movements of armies (particularly rapid and extensive in the desert), the fears and expectations of occupation and liberation, the prospects held out by competing services of propaganda, the spectacle of Europe tearing itself to pieces, the declarations of high principles by the victorious Anglo-American alliance, and the emergence of communist ssia as a world power: all these encouraged the belief

that life might be different.

Among many other changes, the circumstances of the war strengthened the idea of closer unity between the Arab countries. Cairo was the main centre from which the British organized the struggle for the Middle East, and also its economic life; the need to conserve shipping led to the creation of the Middle East Supply Centre (British at first, and later Anglo-American), which went beyond regulating imports to encouraging changes in agriculture and industry which would make the Middle East more fully self-supporting. The fact that Cairo was the centre of military and economic decision-making gave an opportunity to the Egyptian government (with rather vague encouragement from Britain) to take the initiative in creating closer links between Arab states. In early 1941, a British ultimatum to the king of Egypt compelled him to ask the *Wafd* Party to form a government; at this critical moment of the war it seemed desirable to Britain to have an Egyptian government which could control the country and was more ready to co-operate with the British than the king and those

who surrounded him. The authority which this gave the *Wafd* government enabled it to undertake discussions with other Arab states about the possibility of closer and more formal unity between them. There were differences of sentiment and interest: in Syria and Iraq, the leaders still had memories of the lost unity of the Ottoman Empire, and wished for some closer bond; the governments of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen had some sense of Arab solidarity, but a strong conception of their national interest; all of them wished to create an effective support for the Arabs of Palestine. Two conferences held at Alexandria in 1944 and Cairo in 1945 resulted in the creation of the League of Arab States. This brought together seven states which had some freedom of action (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), along with a representative of the Palestinian Arabs, with the door left open for other Arab countries to join if they should become independent. There was to be no interference in the sovereignty of each country, but it was hoped that they would act together in matters of common concern — in particular, the defence of the Arabs in Palestine and the

Maghrib — and in whatever international organization would emerge from the war. When the United Nations was formed in 1945, the independent Arab states became members of it.

Questions & Exercises

1) How was the situation in the Arab East and the Maghrib countries when the Second World War started?

2) Summarize paragraph 2 in this section and comment.

3) What were the major happenings in 1941, in particular?

4) Why were the years, 1942 and 1943, a turning-point in the Arab East?

5) What was the outcome of the War in 1943 for the Arab Eastern countries?

6) How did the relationship between the two major powers of the world and other countries, particularly the European, crystallize during the last years of the War?

7) What expectations and fears did Arabs have during the War and as a result of it?

8) What was the British role in Egypt and other countries

of the Arab World during the War?

9) Who paved the way towards the creation of the League of Arab States in Egypt, and why?

Chapter VI: National Independence

VI. 1 Introduction

After the end of the war, the Arab East and the Maghrib, which for a generation had been the almost exclusive field of influence of two European states, became one where four or more could exercise power of influence, and where relations between them were not so stable as they had been in the period of the 'Concert of Europe'. In this situation, it was possible for nationalist parties and the local interests they represented to press for changes in the status of their countries.

France was in a weaker position than Britain, and the pressure upon it was the greater. At the end of the war, it was able to restore its position in Indo-China and the Maghrib, after severe repression of disturbances in eastern Algeria in 1945, but was obliged to leave Syria and Lebanon. When British and Free French forces occupied the country in 1941, an arrangement was made by which the French had administrative authority but the British had

strategic control; Britain recognized France's position as paramount European power, subject to the grant of independence to the two countries. The possibilities of a clash of interests were strong. The Free French were unwilling to grant self-government immediately; their claim to be the real France would not seem plausible in French eyes if they surrendered a French territory not, as they believed, to its inhabitants, but to be drawn into the British sphere of influence. For the British, on the other hand, to fulfill the pledge of independence would be to their advantage among Arab nationalists hostile to their policy in Palestine. The politicians of Beirut and Damascus were able to make use of this disagreement in order to obtain independence before the war should end and they be left to the unrestrained rule of the French. There were two crises, one in 1943 when the Lebanese government tried to limit French authority, and the second in 1945 when a similar attempt by the Syrians led to a French bombardment of Damascus, a British intervention and a process of negotiation which ended in an agreement that the French and British should withdraw simultaneously and

completely by the end of 1945. Thus, Syria and Lebanon obtained complete independence, without the limitations that the treaties with Britain had imposed upon Egypt and Iraq. Henceforth, it would be difficult for any nationalist party to settle for less than that.

Questions & Exercises

1) How was the status of the colonial powers in the Arab East in the aftermath of the Second World War?

2) Describe the clash of interests between France and Britain over the Arab Eastern states after the War.

3) How did Syria (and Lebanon) get independence after the War?

VI. 2 The British Colonial Role

The British position in the Middle East appeared to be unshaken and in some ways strengthened by the end of the war. The campaigns in the desert had brought one more Arab country, Libya, under British rule. In the Arab parts of the Middle East, the United States seemed to have no

wish to replace Britain as the paramount power, although there were overtones of rivalry for markets and for control of oil production. The beginning of the 'Cold War', however, led to greater American involvement. In 1947, the United States took over responsibility for defending Greece and Turkey against any Russian threats to them, and the implication of this was that further south, in the Arab countries, Britain would be mainly responsible for protecting western political and strategic interests in the new era of Cold War.

This implicit understanding was to last for ten years or so, and during the earlier part of that period there was a sustained effort by the Labour government in Britain to put its relations with the Arab countries on a new footing. The British withdrawal from India in 1947 might have appeared to make it less important than before for Britain to remain in the Middle East, but this was not the government's view; investments, oil, markets, communications, the strategic interests of the western alliance, and the sense that the Middle East and Africa remained the only parts of the

world where Britain could take the initiative seemed to make it more important to retain its position, but on a new basis.

The general line of British policy was one of support for Arab independence and a greater degree of unity, while preserving essential strategic interests by friendly agreement, and also of helping in economic development and the acquisition of technical skills to the point where Arab governments could take responsibility for their own defence. This policy rested on two assumptions: that Arab governments would regard their major interests as being identical with those of Britain and the western alliance; and that British and American interests would coincide to the extent that the stronger party would be willing to leave the defence of its interests to the weaker. In the next ten years, however, both these assumptions were proved to be invalid.

The first country where a decision had to be made was Libya. At the end of the war there was a British military

administration in two of the three regions of the country, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, and a French in the third, Fazzan. In the eastern region, Cyrenaica, forces loyal to the head of the *Sanusi* order had helped in the conquest and been given promises about the future. In discussions among the major powers and other interested parties and at the United Nations, the idea was put forward that Libya might be a country in which the new concept of a 'trusteeship' of 'more advanced' countries could be applied. In one of the first expressions of that hostility to imperial rule which was to become one of the marks of the United Nations, the majority was reluctant to allow Britain or France to remain in Libya, or Italy to return as trustee. Various local groups asked for independence, although they disagreed about the future relationship between the three regions, and in 1949 the United Nations passed a resolution supporting independence and setup an international commission to supervise the transfer of power. In 1951, the country became independent, with the head of the Sanusi order as King Idris, but for a number of years Britain and the United States kept military bases

there.

In another country, Palestine, the resolution of conflicting interests proved to be impossible, and this was to cause lasting damage to relations between the Arab peoples and the western powers. During the war, 'Jewish' immigration to Palestine had been virtually impossible, and political activity had for the most part been suspended. As the war drew near its end, it became clear that the relationships of power had changed. The Arabs in Palestine were less capable than before of presenting a united front, because of the exile or imprisonment of some leaders during and after the revolt of 1936 - 39 and the tensions and hostilities generated by violent movements; the formation of the Arab League, with its commitment to support for the Palestinians, seemed to offer them a strength which in the end turned out to be illusory. The 'Jews' in Palestine, for their part, were united by strong communal institutions; many of them had had military training and experience in the British forces during the war; they had wider and more determined support from 'Jews' in other countries, stirred by hatred to 'Jewish' practice in Europe, and resolved to

create not only u refuge for those who had survived but a position of strength which would make such an event impossible in future. The British government, while conscious of the arguments in favour of rapid and large-scale 'Jewish' immigration, was aware also that it would lead to a demand for a 'Jewish' state, and that this would arouse strong opposition from the Arabs, who were fearful of being subjected or dispossessed, and from the Arab states. It was no longer so free to act as it had been before 1939, because of its close relations with the United States and economic dependence on it; the American government, having as yet smaller interests of its own in the Arab East, and being under some pressure from its large and politically active 'Jewish' community, was inclined to use its influence in favour of the Zionist demands for immigration and statehood. The question of Palestine now became an important issue in Anglo-American relations. Attempts to agree upon a joint policy, by means of an Anglo-American committee of inquiry (1945 - 46) and then bilateral discussions, came to no conclusion, for no policy suggested met with the approval of both 'Jews' and Arabs,

and the British government was not willing to carry out a policy which did not have that approval. American pressure upon Britain increased – which would pave the way towards the establishment of a 'Jewish' state in Palestine, but not against the will of Britain.

In 1947 Britain decided to hand the matter over to the United Nations. A special committee of the United Nations sent out to study the problem produced a plan of partition on terms more favourable to the Zionists than that of 1937 had been. This was accepted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1947, with very active support from the United States and from Russia, which wanted the British to withdraw from Palestine. The Arab members of the United Nations and the Palestinian Arabs rejected it, and, faced once more with the impossibility of finding a policy which both Arabs and 'Jews' would accept, Britain decided to withdraw from Palestine on a fixed date, 14 May 1948. This followed a precedent recently set by the British withdrawal from India, and it may have been hoped that, as in India, the imminence of

withdrawal would bring the two parties to some kind of agreement. As the date came nearer, British authority inevitably decreased and fighting broke out, in which the 'Jews', with the British support, soon gained the upper hand. This in turn led to a decision by the neighbouring Arab states to intervene, and thus a series of local conflicts turned into a war. On 14 May the 'Jewish' community declared its independence as the so-called state of 'Israel', and this was immediately recognized by the United States and Russia. Consequently, Egyptian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese forces moved into the mainly Arab parts of the country. In a situation where there were no fixed frontiers or clear divisions of population, fighting took place between the new 'Israeli' army and those of the Arab states, and in four campaigns interrupted by cease-fires 'Israel' was able to occupy the greater part of the country. From prudence to begin with, later because of panic and the deliberate policy of the 'Israeli' army, almost two-thirds of the Arab population left their homes and became refugees. At the beginning of 1949 a series of armistices was made between 'Israel' and its Arab

neighbours under the supervision of the United Nations, and stable frontiers were created. About 75 per cent of Palestine was included within the frontiers of 'Israel'; a strip of land on the southern coast, stretching from Gaza to the Egyptian frontier, was taken under Egyptian administration; the remainder was annexed by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (the name taken by Trans-Jordan in 1946 after a treaty with Britain redefined the relations between the two countries). Jerusalem was divided between 'Israel' and Jordan, although many other countries did not formally recognize the division.

Public opinion in the Arab countries was much affected by these events. They were regarded as a defeat for the Arab governments, and this was to lead to a number of upheavals in the next few years. They were also generally thought of as a victory for the British, who had succeeded in withdrawing their officials and soldiers from the country without loss, but in circumstances which aroused suspicion and hostility on the Arab side. In Arab countries, the prevalent opinion was that British policy in effect had

helped the Zionists: having encouraged 'Jewish' immigration, the government had not been willing to accept its implications for the Arabs, and either stop it before it would lead to their subjection or dispossession, or at least try to limit the damage it would cause. The United States for its part was seen to have acted throughout in support of the Zionists without feeling ashamed of this attitude and conduct.

Nevertheless, both the British and the American positions remained strong. The 'Israeli' government, in which the dominant figure was David Ben Gurion (1886 - 1973), refused to take back any substantial number of Arab refugees; but it was generally accepted by the British, American and 'Israeli' governments that they would sooner or later be absorbed into the population of the countries where they had found refuge, and that if not peace, then at least a stable *modus vivendi* between 'Israel' and its neighbours might be achieved. In the meantime, the main energies of the government of 'Israel' were given to the task of absorbing large numbers of 'Jewish' immigrants,

not only from eastern Europe but also from the Arab countries. This changed the structure of the population; by 1956, out of a total of 1.6 million, Arab Muslims and Christians numbered 200,000, or some 12.5 per cent. Much of the land which had belonged to Arabs was taken, by different legal means, for Jewish settlement. Although Arab citizens of 'Israel' had theoretically some legal and political rights, they did not fully belong to the national community which was taking shape. The movement of population into 'Israel' had an impact in Arab states as well. In the generation after 1948 the ancient 'Jewish' communities of the Arab countries virtually ceased to exist; those from Yemen and Iraq moved mainly to 'Israel'; those from Syria, Egypt and the Maghrib to Europe and North America as well as to 'Israel'; only the 'Jewish' community of Morocco continued to be of significant size.

In the next few years, another kind of political conflict was added to the Arab-Israeli conflict but in other countries in which Britain still had a special position: Iran, beyond the eastern boundary of the Arab world, where nationalization

of the British-owned oil company caused an international crisis, and Egypt. Here Britain still had much freedom of action. Having differed from British policy in Palestine, the United States was not disposed to weaken the position of Britain as guardian of western interests in other parts of the Arab world, although the large investment of American capital in the oil fields of Saudi Arabia did lead to the replacement of British by American influence there. The Soviet Union, for its part, was too fully occupied with other regions to follow an active policy in the Arab countries. The Arab states, although committed in principle to the defence of the interests of the Palestinians, were mainly concerned with their own problems.

The basis of British power in the Arab East had always been the military presence in Egypt, and it was here that Britain found itself faced with the most urgent problem. As soon as the war ended, there was a demand by the Egyptian government for a change in the agreement which had been reached in 1936. Negotiations between the two governments took place from 1946 onwards, but failed on

two points: first, the Egyptian claim to sovereignty over the Sudan, a claim which the British government did not accept, in the belief that most Sudanese would not accept it and that Britain had obligations to them; and secondly, the question of the British strategic position in the country. In pursuance of the treaty of 1936, British forces were withdrawn from Cairo and the delta, but there was a deadlock in regard to the Canal Zone; British statesmen and strategists thought it was essential to remain there in strength, both for the defence of western interests in the Arab East and for that of British interests in the eastern Mediterranean and Africa. In 1951 serious fighting broke out between British forces and Egyptian guerillas, and in January 1952 this touched off a popular movement in Cairo in which installations associated with the British presence were destroyed; the breakdown of order in its turn gave the opportunity for the seizure of power in July 1952 by a secret society of Egyptian officers of middle rank, at first with a corporate leadership and then under the domination of Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir (1918 - 70). The break with the past, which was to show itself in many spheres, was

symbolized by the deposition of the king and the proclamation of Egypt as a republic.

Having firmer control over the country than previous governments, the military rulers were able to resume negotiations with the British. Of the two main issues, that of the Sudan was removed when the Egyptian government reached a direct agreement with the main Sudanese parties in 1953. Political movements in the Sudan had been able to express themselves more freely after an elected Legislative Assembly was created in 1947, and three main forces had appeared: those who wished for independence and the preservation of a link with Britain, those who wished for independence and a closer link with Egypt, and those who spoke for the non-Muslim, non-Arab peoples of the south. The agreement made with Egypt involved the first two of these, and it was accepted by Britain, although with some reluctance. It was agreed that power should be transferred from the Anglo-Egyptian condominium to the Sudanese under international supervision. Elections were held in the same year, and by 1955 the process was completed; the

administration was in Sudanese hands and British and Egyptian armed forces were withdrawn. The largest shadow over the future was thrown by the beginning of revolt and guerilla warfare in the southern provinces, where the population, being neither Arab nor Muslim, was apprehensive of the results of being transferred from British to Arab rule.

With the Sudanese problem resolved, negotiations on the other issue, that of Britain's strategic position, went ahead, and agreement was reached in 1954. British forces were to be withdrawn from the Canal Zone, and more than seventy years of British occupation would come to an end; but it was agreed that the base could be brought into active use if there were an attack on Egypt, another Arab state, or Turkey. The inclusion of Turkey was an expression of British and American concern for the defence of western interests in the Middle East against a possible threat from Russia; various plans for a Middle Eastern defence pact were being discussed, and Egypt's willingness to include mention of Turkey in the agreement seemed to indicate that

it might be willing to join in.

The end of foreign occupation in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and the Sudan made it difficult for Iraq and Jordan to accept less than what they had obtained. In Iraq, the regime which had been restored by the British intervention in 1941 was anxious to retain a strategic link with the western powers; it was more aware of the proximity of Russia than were other Arab countries. In 1948, an attempt was made to renegotiate the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 on these lines, but failed because of opposition from those who wished Iraq to be less committed to the western alliance. Then, in 1955, the government made an agreement with Turkey to set up a common defence and economic pact (The Baghdad Pact); Pakistan, Iran and Britain joined it, and the United States later began to participate in its work. In the context of this pact, an agreement was with Britain by which the two British air-bases were handed over to Iraq. but Britain agreed to give assistance if there were an attack on Iraq, or the threat of one, and if Iraq asked for help.

In Jordan, there was a similar situation of a regime anxious for help against dangers from outside – from its Arab neighbours and also from the so-called 'Israel' (but under pressure from nationalist public opinion). After 1948, the country had a majority of Palestinians, who looked upon 'Israel' as their main enemy and watched for any sign that the regime was making concessions to it. In 1951, King Abdullah was assassinated, a mark of nationalist suspicion that he was more accommodating towards the 'Israelis' and their western sponsors than seemed wise and right. The uneasy balance shifted for a time in favour of complete independence. In 1957, the treaty with Britain was brought to an end by agreement and British forces were withdrawn from the bases which they had occupied; but it was a sign of the precarious position of Jordan and of the Hashemite regime that in the same year the British and American governments declared that the independence and integrity of the country were of vital interest to them.

In the Maghrib, it was more difficult for France to come to

terms with the demand for independence. The French presence there was not only a matter of armies or the domination of metropolitan economic interests, but of the large French communities who lived there, controlled the profitable sectors of the economy and held the greater number of positions in the government at all, except the lowest, levels. To bring about any change in the relations of French and Arabs involved a greater effort and met with stronger resistance. The efforts began in Tunisia and Morocco as soon as the war was over. In Tunisia, the Neo-Destour Party had the moral advantage that its leader, Bourguiba, had given unequivocal support to the Free French and their allies while in exile or prison during the war, and the material strength derived from the combination of the party and the trade-union federation, founded after the war when Tunisians were allowed to join unions for the first time. In Morocco, strength came from a combination of several elements. The small nationalist groups which had appeared in the 1930s organized themselves into the Independence Party *Istiqlal*, and established relations with the sultan, Muhammad V (1927 -

61), who began discreetly to demand the end of the French protectorate. The idea of independence began to touch wider strata of society: a trade-union federation was formed and the *Istiqlal* (Independence) party was able to establish control over it; the rural migration into Casablanca and other cities created stronger links between city and countryside and encouraged the spread of nationalist ideas. The presence of foreign commercial interests protected by international treaty since the beginning of the century, and a new American strategic interest, gave the nationalists some hope of a certain sympathy from outside.

The weak French governments of the years after the war, based upon shifting coalitions and attentive to a public opinion which had not recovered from the humiliation of defeat, could offer no more than repression or 'co-sovereignty', which meant that the European community would have equal weight with the indigenous population in local institutions and that the decisive voice would still be that of the French metropolitan government. In 1952,

Bourguiba and a number of others were arrested in Tunisia, and a movement of active resistance began, which evoked a similar movement of violence among European settlers. In the next year, matters came to a crisis in Morocco. Contacts between the palace and the *Istiqlal* Party had grown closer, and the sultan demanded total sovereignty. In reply, the French authorities used, perhaps for the last time, a traditional mode of political action. They brought in the forces of rural chieftains whose power they had built up and whose position was threatened by the stronger central control which was implicit in the nationalist vision of the future. In 1953, the sultan was deposed and exiled; the effect of this was to make him a unifying symbol for most Moroccans, and turn the agitation into armed insurrection.

In 1954, however, French policy changed. The French position in Indo-China was under severe threat from a new kind of popular nationalist movement in arms, and in Algeria a similar movement was emerging. A new and more decisive French government opened negotiations with the Neo-*Destour* (constitution) and with the sultan of

Morocco, who was brought back from exile. Both countries were given independence in 1956. In Morocco, the Spanish zone and the international city of Tangier were fully incorporated into the independent state. Independence strengthened the hand of the sultan (who became king in 1957), but in Tunisia the *bey,* who had played little part in the political process, was deposed and Bourguiba became president. In both countries, however, independence and relations with France remained precarious for the next few years, since by this time Algeria was engulfed in a war of independence: the first shots were fired in November 1954, and soon its repercussions were felt all over the Maghrib.

Questions & Exercises

1) How did the major powers of the world arrange for exploiting the Arab Eastern countries after the War? Explain in detail.

2) What was the emerging role of the USA then?

3) Did Britain actually help the Arabs to reunite and develop their nation industrially? Discuss in class.

4) What did France and Britain do in Libya at that time?

5) How did the Palestinian question unveil the British intention and policy towards Arab interests?

6) When did the first revolt against the 'Jewish' immigrants and the British colonial practice take place in Palestine?

7) How did Britain, the USA, and Russia pave the way for the establishment of a 'Jewish' state in Palestine?

8) Which colonial powers were the first to recognize the so-called state of 'Israel'?

9) What were the consequences of the 1948 war for liberation in Palestine? Why was that?

10) How did the Jews in Arab countries respond to the establishment of the so-called state of 'Israel'?

11) What other types of conflict took place between Britain and other countries in the region?

12) What happened later between Britain and some Arab states, particularly in 1951 and 1952? How did the Egyptians react?

13) What was the British colonial role in Iraq and Jordan after 1948?

14) What was the French colonial role in the Maghrib states at that time?

VI. 3 The Suez Crisis

By the middle of the 1950s, most Arab countries which had been under European rule had become *formally* independent; foreign military bases remained in some of them, but would soon be abandoned. French rule remained only in Algeria, where it was being actively challenged by a popular nationalist revolt. British rule or protection remained in the eastern and southern fringes of the Arabian peninsula. The main state of the peninsula, Saudi Arabia, had never had a period of foreign rule, but British influence had been considerable. The discovery and exploitation of oil had led to a replacement of British by American influence, but had also made it possible for the patriarchal rule of the Sa'udi family to begin the process of turning itself into a more fully developed system of government; by the time King 'Abd al-'Aziz died in 1953, the state he had founded was becoming more central and important in

the political life of the region. Yemen, on the other hand, remained isolated from other countries under its *imam*, in spite of becoming a member of the Arab League.

The ambiguities of policy in Iraq and Jordan, however — the desire to end the presence of British forces, but at the same time to have some military relationships with the western powers — showed that formal withdrawal of foreign military forces did not by itself necessarily create a different relationship with the former imperial rulers, but rather restated the problem of independence in a new form. The Arab countries found themselves faced by the growing power and influence, in all aspects of economic and political life, of another western state. The United States, which now, in the period of the Cold War and economic expansion, believed that its interests in the Middle East could be protected only through close relations with local governments prepared to link their policy with that of the western alliance. Many politicians and political groups argued, however, that the only guarantee of independence in the postcolonial world would lie in maintaining

neutrality between the two armed camps. Since the western camp was linked with memories of imperial rule, and with the problems of Palestine and Algeria which still became worse, and since it was from this side that the main pressure to make defence agreements came, the desire for neutrality carried with it a tendency to incline more in the direction of the other camp, i.e. the Eastern Bloc.

The polarization of the western and eastern blocs, and the conflict of policies between neutrality and the western alliance, gave a new dimension to the relationships between the Arab states. The desire for a closer union between them had become part of the common language of Arab politics; it was now a matter in dispute whether such unity should be brought about within the framework of a close agreement with the western powers, or independently of them.

The future of the relationship between the Arab states and 'Israel' also became linked with the general question of alignment. In the 1950s, the British and American governments discussed plans for a resolution of the

problem: there should be some adjustment of the frontiers of 1949 in favour of the Arabs, the return of some of the refugees to their homes and the absorption of most of them in the surrounding Arab countries; if the Arab states had a close links with the western powers, this would imply an acceptance of such a solution and some kind of recognition of the existence of 'Israel'. On the other hand, the formation of a neutral group of Arab states which had positive relations with the eastern and western blocs might be used to increase the political weight of the Arab countries and strengthen their armed forces, so bringing about a radical change in the situation established by the armistice agreements of 1949.

As these differences of approach and policy became acute, they came to be linked with the personality of Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, leader of the military group that now ruled Egypt. The signature of the agreement under which British forces were to leave the Canal Zone did not in fact lead to the entry of Egypt into the western defence system. On the contrary, it gave Egypt the freedom to follow a policy of

non-alignment, and to form around itself a bloc of similarly non-aligned Arab states that the outside world would have to deal with as a whole. One expression of this policy was the close relationship established with the leading supporters of the idea of nonalignment, India and Yugoslavia; another and more dramatic one was an agreement made in 1955 for the supply of arms to Egypt from the Soviet Union and its allies, an agreement which broke the control over arms supplies to 'Israel' and its Arab neighbours which the United States, Britain and France had tried to maintain.

This policy of neutralism almost inevitably drew Egypt and its allies into enmity with those whose interests would be affected by it. The western powers would at least have to expect obstacles and limits to the pursuit of their political and economic interests; they could no longer control the development of the problem of 'Israel', or other problems, as they might have hoped to do; for the United States government in the era of the Cold War, refusal to join a western defence alliance in the Middle East was in effect to

join the eastern bloc. The appeal for neutralism and closer unity under Egyptian leadership, made by 'Abd al-Nasir to Arab peoples over the heads of their governments, was a threat to those Arab regimes which stood for different policies: in particular, that of Iraq, which after the formation of the Baghdad Pact became the chief protagonist of the western alliance; its political life in this period was dominated by Nur al-Sa'id (1888—1958), who had played an important part in Arab national politics since the Arab revolt during the First World War. The rise of a strong Egyptian government, having its own source of arms and appealing strongly to the feelings of Palestinians and other Arabs, was seen by 'Israel' as a threat to its position. These local antagonisms in turn deepened the hostility of the western powers: the United States because of its link with 'Israel', Britain because of its membership of the Baghdad Pact, and France because of the encouragement and help which Egypt, with its vision of an independent and non-aligned Arab world, was thought to be giving to the Algerian revolution.

Between 1955 and 1961 there was a series of crises in which all these factors were involved. In 1956, the United States, which had held out hopes that it would give Egypt financial aid for a very large irrigation project (the High Dam at Aswan), suddenly withdrew its offer. In response to this, the Egyptian government no less suddenly nationalized the Suez Canal Company and took over the administration of the canal. This caused alarm to users of the canal, who feared that the freedom to use it might be subject to political considerations. To the British and French governments it seemed like an act of hostility, both because of the British and French stake in the company which had built and owned the canal, and because it increased 'Abd al-Nasir's standing in the Arab countries. The 'Israelis' saw it as an opportunity to weaken an over-powerful and hostile neighbouring state, the frontier with which had been disturbed for some time. The result was a secret agreement between France, Britain and 'Israel' to attack Egypt and overturn the rule of 'Abd al-Nasir.

In October, 'Israeli' forces invaded Egypt and moved towards the Suez Canal. In accordance with their previous agreement, Britain and France sent an ultimatum to both 'Israel' and Egypt to withdraw from the Canal Zone, and 'Abd al-Nasir's refusal gave a pretext for British and French forces to attack and occupy part of the zone. This action, however, was a threat not only to Egypt and those Arab states which supported it, but to the United States and Soviet Union, which as great powers could not accept that such decisive steps should be taken in an area in which they had interests without those interests being taken into account. Under American and Soviet pressure, and faced with worldwide hostility and the danger of financial collapse, the three forces withdrew. This was one of those rare episodes when the structure of power in the world stood clearly revealed: the hostility of local forces drew in world powers of the second rank pursuing interests of their own, only to come up sharply against the limits of their strength when they challenged the interests of the super-powers.

The results of this crisis were to increase the standing of 'Abd al-Nasir in the surrounding Arab countries, since he was generally thought to have emerged from the crisis as the political victor, and also to deepen the split between those who supported him and those who regarded his policies as dangerous. This division now entered as a factor into the internal affairs of other Arab states. In 1958, it combined with local rivalries to cause an outbreak of civil war in Lebanon. In the same year, a struggle for power between political groups in Syria led one of them to take the initiative in calling for union with Egypt; the union took place, and in February the two countries were merged in the United Arab Republic. The two Hashemite kingdoms, Iraq and Jordan, set up a rival union, but later in the year, in July, the same combination of internal discontents with the hopes raised by Egyptian leadership of a new Arab world led to the seizure of power in Iraq by a group of army officers. The king and most of his family were killed, and so was Nur al-Sa'id. Iraq became a republic, and the Hashemite dynasty could no longer hope to play a leading role in Arab politics (although the other

branch of it continued to rule in Jordan). The news of the revolution led to the sending of American troops to Lebanon and British to Jordan to stabilize an uncertain situation, but they soon withdrew, and so far as Britain was concerned, this marked the end of its playing an active and major part in Arab politics.

At first the revolution appeared to open the prospect of joining the union of Egypt, Iraq and Syria, but the division of interests between Baghdad and Cairo soon showed itself. Within the United Arab Republic itself, the differing interests of Damascus and Cairo also led, in 1961, to a military *coup* in Syria and the dissolution of the union. In spite of these setbacks, however, 'Abd al-Nasir still appeared, in the eyes of most Arabs and much of the outside world, as the symbol of the movement of Arab peoples towards greater unity and genuine independence.

Questions & Exercises

1) What is meant by 'formally independent''? Explain in detail in relation to the position of the Arab states and their relationships with the western powers.

2) What had the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula led to? Explain the consequences.

3) Summarize paragraph 2 in this section and comment on its content.

4) How did the creation of the so-called 'state of Israel' affect the relationship between the major western powers and Arab states?

5) How far was the Arab policy of non-alignment successful in your opinion? Discuss with your tutor and colleagues.

6) Describe the role of each of the major colonial powers at that time: Britain, the USA, and France.

7) How did the colonial powers, and the "Axis of Evil: 'Israel'" respond to the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company on the part of the Egyptian government? Explain.

8) What happened soon after the Zionists, Britain, and France invaded the Suez Canal zone? Explain in detail.

VI. 4 The Algerian War

The years of crisis in the Middle East were also those of the final crisis of imperial rule in the Maghnib, where the Arabs of Algeria fought a long and finally successful battle to obtain independence from France.

Algerians faced greater difficulties than most other Arab peoples in their struggle for independence. Officially their country was not a colony but an integral part of metropolitan France, and the demand that it should break away met with the resistance of those to whom the land of France was indivisible. Moreover, the European settlers had now become almost a nation of their own, rooted in Algeria, where 80 per cent of them had been born. They would not willingly give up their position of strength: they controlled the most fertile land and most productive agriculture, improved by mechanization and still expanding; the main cities, Algiers and Oran, were more

French than Algerian; they held the vast majority of positions in the government and in the professions; their strong and long-standing influence over the local administration and the government in Paris could prevent any changes which were to their disadvantage. A manifesto issued by a group of educated Algerians in 1943, calling for an autonomous republic linked with France, met with no response except the abolition of some legal disadvantages; a more violent movement in 1945 was suppressed ruthlessly. Some changes were then made: Algerian Muslims would be represented in the French parliament, and they would have the same number of members as the Europeans in the Algerian Assembly; but the elections to the Assembly were managed by the administration in order to produce an easily-led majority.

Beneath the surface of unshaken French control, however, Algerian society was changing. The Muslim population was growing at a high rate; by 1954 it had risen to almost 9 millions, of whom more than half were less than twenty years old; the European population was almost a million.

The greater part of the Muslim population was crowded into the less productive part of the land, without the capital to develop it, and with limited facilities for credit, in spite of small and late attempts by the government to provide them. As a result, living standards were low and the rate of rural unemployment high. There was a growing migration of peasants from the depressed and over-populated countryside into the plains, to work as labourers on European farms, and into the cities of the coast, where they formed an unskilled, underemployed proletariat; by 1954 almost a fifth of the Muslims were town-dwellers in Algeria, and about 300,000 had gone overseas to France. Opportunities for education were larger than they had been, but still small; 90 per cent of the population were illiterate. Only a few thousands went from primary to secondary schools, and only a few dozens into higher education; by 1954 there were less than 200 Muslim doctors and pharmacists, and a smaller number of engineers.

Among migrants living away from their families in alien cities, soldiers in the French army, students with limited

opportunities, there was an awareness of the great changes occurring in the world: French defeats in the war and in Indo-China, the independence of Asian and African countries, the changes in ideas about colonial rule. Independence began to seem a possibility, but at a price: the repression of the disturbances of 1945 had shown that it would not be given easily. In the years after 1945, the party of those who were prepared to settle for a better position within the French political system lost much of its influence, and within the nationalist party there was gradually formed a revolutionary group: men for the most part of limited education but with military experience in the French army, although later they were to attract members of the educated elite to them. In 1954, they formed the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN; in English, the National Front of Liberation), and in November of that year, they fired the first shots in the revolution.

To begin with, it was a limited movement, and its chances of success could be doubted. The momentum of revolution and the actions of the French government, however,

gradually turned it into a national movement with widespread support in the world. The first reaction of the government was one of military repression; when a government, more inclined to the left, came to power, it seemed prepared to make concessions, but then gave in to the opposition of the army and the Europeans of Algeria. At the end of 1956, an attempt to negotiate a settlement through the help of Morocco and Tunisia came to nothing, when some of the Algerian leaders flying from Rabat to Tunis had their plane diverted to Algiers and were arrested there; the French government accepted an act which seems to have been one of local initiative.

By now, effective power had been transferred from the government in Paris to the army and the Europeans of Algeria; on the other side, the greater part of the Algerian Muslim population had rallied to the FLN. A well-informed and sympathetic French scholar observed that, after two years of war, '**almost all of Muslim society found itself solidly and effectively supported by a clandestine structure. . . the men in control came not**

only from the revolutionary ranks. . . they represented the entire range of the elite of the Algerian population'. The outlines of a future independent Algerian nation began to appear, with the fervour generated by revolution oriented towards social equality and the re-appropriation of the land. The war reached its military climax in 1957, when there was a sharp and lengthy struggle for control of Algiers itself. The army re-established its control over the capital, and in the countryside followed a policy of large-scale displacement of the population. The nature of the conflict gradually changed: the FLN operating from Morocco, Tunisia, and Cairo proclaimed itself the **'Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic'** in 1958, receiving support and conducting negotiations all over the world, and with encouragement also from some radical elements in France. An attempt by the French army to expand the war into Tunisia was stopped by American and other objections, and it was because of the fear that international pressure would overwhelm the weak government of post-war France that the army, the Europeans and their supporters in France virtually imposed

a change of regime; the Fourth Republic came to an end and in 1958 De Gaulle returned to power, with a new constitution which gave the president of the republic wider powers.

It was the hope of those who brought De Gaulle to power that he would use his position to strengthen the French hold over Algeria. It soon became clear, however, that he was moving, in obscure and indirect ways, towards a settlement with the Algerians, although it is not certain that he envisaged from the first the grant of complete independence. In the first phase, his policy was one of continuing the military measures to suppress the revolt, but of acting independently of the army and the Europeans of Algeria in order to improve the conditions of the Muslims. A plan of economic development was announced: industry would be encouraged, land would be distributed. Elections were to be held for the Algerian Assembly, and it was hoped that they would produce an alternative leadership with which France could negotiate without needing to come to terms with the FLN. This hope proved vain, however, and there was no alternative to negotiating with

the FLN. The first talks in 1960 came to nothing. By the next year, De Gaulle had greater freedom of manoeuvre: a referendum in France showed that there was a majority in favour of granting self-determination to Algeria; an attempt by the army in Algeria to carry out a *coup d'etat* against De Gaulle was suppressed. Negotiations were resumed, and two problems proved the most difficult to resolve: that of the European community, and that of the Algerian Sahara, which France wished to retain because by now important resources of oil and natural gas had been discovered there and were being exploited by a French company. In the end, the French conceded both points: the Europeans were to be free to stay or to leave with their possessions; the whole of Algeria, including the Sahara, was to become a sovereign state, which would receive French aid. An agreement was signed in March 1962 . . . . Independence had been secured, but at great human cost to all concerned. A large part of the Muslim population had been displaced, perhaps 300,000 or more had been killed, many thousands who had been on the French side were killed or forced to emigrate after independence. The French had lost perhaps 20,000

dead and many more injured. In spite of guarantees, the vast majority of the settler population left the country; too much blood had flowed to be forgotten; an activist group among the settlers had taken to acts of violence in the last stages of the war, and this helped to make the position of the Europeans shaky.

Questions & Exercises

1) What is meant by the 'land of France' in line 5, paragraph 2 of this section? Discuss the colonial implications of this and similar expressions still used in relation to Palestine.

2) Describe the relationship between the French colonial power and the Algerian citizens under occupation.

3) Describe the socio-economic situation of the Algerian citizens under the French rule.

4) How was the situation of education in Algeria during the French occupation? Discuss in detail.

5) How did the first seeds of revolution begin to grow against the French colonizer?

6) How did the Algerian Revolution start to become stronger against the colonial power?

7) What was the policy of De Gaulle in Algeria when he returned to power in 1958?

8) How did the Algerians get their independence in 1962? Describe in detail and discuss in class. Can the Algerian example be followed in the near future for the liberation of the whole of Palestine, *inshallah*? How?

Part III: Changing Societies In The Arab World


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Chapter VII: Population And Economic Growth

VII. 1 Introduction

The years of political stress were a time when societies were changing rapidly. First of all, the growth of population and its pressure upon the means of subsistence were now to be observed almost everywhere, and were beginning to be recognized as the source of problems of many kinds.

In Egypt, the increase had been continuing for more than a century, with ever-growing momentum. 'While the rate of increase in the 1930s had been a little more than 1 per cent a year, by 1960 it was between 2.5 and 3 per cent; the total population had increased from 16 millions in 1937 to 26 in 1960. The change was caused primarily by a decrease in the death-rate, from 27 per thousand in 1939 to 18 per thousand in 1960; infant mortality in particular had decreased in that time from 160 to 109 per thousand.

Compared with this, there had been little change in the birthrate. Similar rates of growth existed by now in other countries, although the process had started later than in Egypt. In Morocco, there seems to have been little natural increase before 1940, but in the twenty years after that the population grew from 7 to 11.5 millions. In Tunisia, the increase in these years was from 2.6 to 3.8 millions; in Syria, from 2.5 to 4.5 millions; in Iraq from 3.5 to 7 millions.

The result of such a rapid increase was that the age-distribution of the people changed; by 1960, more than half the population in most countries was under the age of twenty. There were other changes too in the structure of the population. The foreign element, which had played so large a part in the modern sector of the economy, had shrunk as political conditions changed and economic privileges were whittled away. The number of foreign residents in Egypt shrank from 250,000 in 1937 to 143,000 by 1960; in Libya from 100,000 to half as much in the same period; in Tunisia from 200,000 to less than 100,000; in Morocco

from 350,000 to 100,000; in Algeria from almost a million to less than 100,000. As against this, there was a large movement of 'Jews' both from Europe and from the countries of the Middle East and the Maghrib to the new 'state of Israel', of which the 'Jewish' population grew from 750,000 in 1948 to 1.9 million by 1960; the ancient 'Jewish' communities of the Arab countries dwindled in a corresponding degree, through emigration to 'Israel', Europe and America.

A change of more general significance was the movement of population away from the land. This came about mainly as a result of the increase of the rural population above the capacity of the land to support it, but in some places it was caused also by changes in agricultural techniques: the introduction of tractors on grain-producing land meant that fewer labourers were needed; the owners of land which was intensively cultivated for commercial purposes might prefer skilled workers to sharecroppers. In one country, Palestine, the displacement was more directly a result of political changes. Rural over-population was already to be

seen in Arab villages by 1948, but the events of that year led to the dispossession of more than half the villagers, and most of them became landless refugees in camps or slums in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

For peasants who could not survive in the villages, the centres of power and trade had a positive attraction: they could hope for work in the growing industrial and service sectors of the economy, and for a higher standard of living and better opportunities for the education of their children. Many thousands of peasants from Kabylia in Algeria and from Morocco and Tunisia emigrated from their countries to the great cities of France, and to a lesser extent of Germany; by 1960 there were approximately half a million North Africans in France. Most of the rural migrants, however, went to the cities of their own or neighbouring countries. In Morocco, Casablanca grew more rapidly than the other cities: from being a city of a quarter of a million in 1936 it had become one of a million by 1960. Cairo had had 1.3 million inhabitants in 1937; by 1960, it had 3.3 millions, more than half of whom had been born outside

the city. The population of Baghdad grew from half a million in the 1940s to 1.5 million by the 1960s. The most spectacular growth was that of Amman, from 30,000 in 1948 to a quarter of a million by 1960; most of the growth was the result of the movement of refugees from Palestine.

Because of these internal migrations, most of the Arab countries were changing from mainly rural societies to societies where a large and growing part of the population was concentrated in a few large cities. In Egypt, almost 40 per cent of the population lived in cities by 1960; almost 13 percent were in Cairo (and more than that, if the town of Giza, now virtually incorporated in it, was included). Casablanca held 10 per cent of all Moroccans, Baghdad 20 per cent of all Iraqis.

Questions & Exercises

1) Which Arab country had more increase in population between the 1930s and 1960s?

2) Where were most of the people concentrated? Provide examples.

3) What was the main reason for population increase in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, in particular?

4) Why did many people move away from the land? What was the result of this movement?

5) What attracted peasants in particular to move to larger cities in their own countries and abroad?

VII. 2 Economic Growth

If the growing populations were to be fed, and living standards improved, more would need to be produced in countryside and city. This need gave a new urgency to the idea of economic growth, which attracted governments for other reasons as well. In the last phase of imperial rule both Britain and France began to look to rapid economic growth as a possible way of creating a common interest between rulers and ruled, and when nationalist governments took over they too looked upon economic development as the only way of achieving the strength and self-sufficiency without which nations could not be really independent.

This was therefore a period when governments intervened more strongly in the economic process in order to encourage growth. In the countryside, it was an era of large-scale irrigation works in a number of countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria and above all Egypt and Iraq. In Egypt, more than a century of changes in the system of irrigation reached its conclusion in the late 1950s, when work started on the High Dam at Aswan, to be built with financial and technical assistance from the Soviet Union, which stepped in when the United States withdrew. Previous irrigation schemes in the Nile valley had aimed at holding up the annual flood and distributing the water in such a way as to irrigate a larger area of land perennially, and so to make possible the production of more than one crop a year, but the High Dam was to do more than this. The purpose of building it was to store successive floods in a vast lake and release the water where and when it was needed. In this way, fluctuations in the volume of water from one year to another could be ignored, and for the first time in the long history of settled

life in the Nile valley the annual flood would no longer be the central event of the year. It was hoped in this way to increase the cultivated area by 1 million *feddans*, and the crop area by even more, because of the extension of perennial irrigation to land which was already under cultivation. The dam would also be used for generating electric power, and there was a possibility of developing fisheries in the lake. On the debit side, however, the rate of evaporation of the water would be high, and there might be a change in the climate; the retention of water in the lake would mean that its silt would be deposited there and not in the more northern parts of Egypt.

In Iraq, an increase in the revenues of the government because of greater production of oil made it possible for the first time to carry out works of irrigation and flood-control on a large scale and in accordance with a plan. In 1950 a development board was created, with control over the larger part of the revenues from oil, and it planned and carried out large schemes of flood-control on both the

Tigris and Euphrates, and the building of dams on tributaries of the Tigris in the north.

This was a period too when tractors were introduced on a large scale. They had already been in use by 1939 on European-owned land in the Maghrib and land usurped by the 'Jews' in Palestine, but scarcely anywhere else. Now, they were imported into Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, where over 10,000 were in use by 1959. The use of chemical fertilizers was not so widespread, except in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, nor were improved seeds and breeds.

The result of these changes was an extension of the cultivated area in a few countries, and of crop areas almost everywhere, and in most places a change from the production of cereals intended for local consumption to that of cash crops to be marketed in the cities or exported. In Morocco, the French authorities in the last phase of their rule made a systematic effort at the 'modernization of the peasantry': indigenous cultivators grouped in large units were instructed in new methods and the production of cash

crops, and provided with co-operative facilities for credit and marketing. In Syria and northern Iraq, the changes were brought about by private enterprise. In the region lying between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, merchants with capital began leasing land from tribal *sheikhs* and growing grain with the help of tractors; for the first time, land in this region of uncertain rainfall could be cultivated on a large scale and with sufficient economy of manpower to make cultivation profitable. The result was a further shift in the balance between settled agriculture and the rearing of livestock — which previously had been the safest and most profitable use of land — and the extension of cultivation: in Syria, the area under grain was more than doubled in twenty years, from 748,000 hectares in 1934 to 1,890,000 in 1954. In the valley of the Euphrates and elsewhere in Syria, cotton cultivation also expanded.

Important as it might be, the expansion of agriculture was not the first priority for most governments with resources to invest. The rapid development of industry seemed more urgent. Most governments gave attention to creating the

infrastructure without which industry could not grow: roads, railways, ports, telecommunications and hydroelectric power. In the three countries of the Maghrib, the French made systematic efforts to improve transport and communications, the generation of electricity and works of irrigation.

Investment by governments, and to a lesser extent by private individuals (mainly Europeans in the Maghrib, and landowners with money to spare further east) led to some expansion of industry. For the most part, it was consumer industry: food-processing, building materials, and textiles, particularly in Egypt and Syria which had their own supplies of cotton. In countries with mineral resources, mining became important, especially phosphates in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

In some ways, economic growth increased the dependence of most Arab states upon the industrialized countries. The accumulation of national capital for investment was not sufficient for their

needs, and growth depended on investment and aid from abroad. In the years after the Second World War some countries were able to draw upon sterling balances accumulated from the expenditure of armies during the war, and those of the Maghrib had funds provided by the French government, out of the aid given to France under the Marshall Plan. There was little private foreign investment, except in Morocco, which was attractive to French capitalists during the post-war years because of fear of what might happen in France. Later, American loans were given to countries whose policies were in harmony with those of the United States, and by the end of the 1950s, Russian loans were being made to Egypt and Syria.

Foreign aid was given, partly at least, for political reasons and, when it was not used to expand the armed forces of newly independent countries which found themselves involved in complicated and often hostile relations with each other, it was used mainly to finance the importation of capital goods or materials

which were needed in order to improve the infrastructure or to develop industry. The result tended to be that dependence on the countries from which aid came was increased. Countries which received aid remained in debt to those which gave it, and their main trading relations continued to be those with the industrial nations of Europe, and to an increasing extent with the United States; an exception was Egypt, which by the end of the 1950s was sending more than 50 per cent of its exports to countries of the eastern bloc and buying about 30 per cent of its imports from them. The pattern of exchanges remained much as it had been before, with raw materials being exported and manufactured goods coming in. There were two significant changes, however: the import of textiles became less important, as local textile factories were created; the import of wheat increased, since local production could no longer feed the growing population of the cities.

Questions & Exercises

1) How did governments normally view the importance of economic growth? Discuss.

2) Which Arab countries initiated large-scale irrigation works, and why?

3) What did the Egyptian government do in this regard? What were the various purposes of such irrigation projects?

4) What enabled Iraq in particular to carry out works of irrigation?

5) How did people in Syria and Iraq manage to have a balance between settled agriculture and the rearing of livestock?

6) How did some Arab states develop their industries and create the right infrastructure for its development?

7) How and why was foreign aid given to some Arab states?

8) What was the result of foreign aid being given to some Arab states, both politically and economically?

VII. 3. The Role Of Oil In Arab Economy

One kind of export grew rapidly in importance in these years, that of oil, and it provided the most striking example of economic interdependence between the countries which possessed oil and the industrialized world.

After a small beginning before the Second World War, the oil resources of countries of the Middle East and the Maghrib proved to be among the most important in the world. By 1960, these countries were producing 25 per cent of the world's crude oil and— because of the small size of the local market — were collectively the world's biggest exporters. The largest production was in Iran and, among the Arab countries, in Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, but there was also production in other countries of the Gulf and in Egypt, and by 1960 large deposits had been discovered also in Libya and Algeria. In the future, Middle Eastern oil seemed likely to become more important still: in

1960, the reserves were estimated to form some 60 per cent of the known reserves of the world.

The concessions to explore for oil, and to extract and export it when discovered, were held everywhere by western companies, for the most part controlled by the small number of great oil companies who between them held a virtual monopoly over the industry. In Iraq, exploitation was in the hands of a company with joint British, French, Dutch and American ownership, in Saudi Arabia in American hands; in Kuwait in British and American; in Libya in the hands of a large number of companies; and in Algeria in those of a French company with government funds invested in it. Their capital came mostly from private western investors, and this indeed was the most important example of western private investment in Arab countries during this period. The higher technology too was provided mainly by European and American officials. The bulk of the oil was exported to western countries. Apart from the oil itself, the contribution of

the host countries lay for the most part in the lower ranks of labour, skilled and unskilled, and this was limited in amount, since the extraction and processing of oil did not demand much labour.

By the beginning of the 1960s, the situation was changing, however. More local men were being employed in highly skilled jobs and, although the total labour force was still not large, those trained in the industry were moving into other sectors of the economy. More important still: the division of profits between the companies and the host countries was changing. In 1948, 65 per cent of the gross receipts of the industry went to the companies, and the countries' share was limited to a royalty, a small percentage on a price which the companies themselves fixed. From 1950, pressure from the producing countries secured changes in the agreements, until their share came to 50 per cent of the net income of the companies. In 1960, the main producing countries (not only in the Middle East) came together in the Organization of

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), an alliance with the aim of presenting a common front in negotiations with the great oil companies, which themselves worked closely together. The way was therefore open for a new process which would end in the countries' taking over the functions of the companies, at least in production.

Questions & Exercises

1) What is the importance of oil in international relations? Discuss in the light of the would-be western terrorist invasion against Iraq and other Arab countries.

2) What is the percentage of Mid-eastern oil reserves in the world as a whole?

3) How far did western investment of oil in Arab countries go before the 1960s?

4) How did the situation of oil production and profit-sharing change in the beginning of the 1960s?

5) What is meant by OPEC? How did these countries organize themselves, and why? Did they manage to change

the situation in favour of the producing countries? If yes, how far? Is such a conflict still going on? How does it show itself?

Chapter VIII: The Profits Of Growth

VIII. 1 Introduction

With the coming of independence, indigenous merchants and landowners were able to take a large part of the profits of economic growth. Merchants were able to use their access to the independent governments in order to obtain a larger share of the import-export trade; even in the Egyptian cotton trade, which for so long had been in the hands of foreign firms and banks, some very large Egyptian companies, working in close collaboration with politicians, played an important part. In Iran, the greater part of the Jewish investors, which had been prominent in the trade with England and other foreign countries, left when their position became difficult after the creation of the state of 'Israel', and their place was mainly taken by Iraqi merchants. Most of the new industries also were in local hands, because

of a certain accumulation of capital by merchants and landowners, but also because of the need for young industries to have access to the government. In some countries, however, collaboration between indigenous and foreign capitalists existed. This was true of Morocco, where mixed Franco-Moroccan companies continued to be important after independence, and up to a certain date of Egypt too. Indigenous or mixed banks also were becoming important, the holding and investment of royalties and private profits from the oil industry were largely in the hands of banks managed by Lebanese and Palestinians in Beirut.

Questions & Exercises

1) What was the role of local investors in growth profits after the independence of Arab countries? Provide examples.

2) Where, in particular, was collaboration between indigenous and foreign capitalists still working after independence in the Arab World?

VIII. 2 The Situation of Agriculture

In most places, too, the expansion of agriculture in the years after the war was primarily in the interest of those who owned or controlled land, and in particular of large landowners who had access to credit from banks and mortgage companies and could accumulate capital for investment. In Morocco and Tunisia, land which had been in the hands of foreign owners was bought after independence either by indigenous capitalists or by the government. In Egypt, the position of the large landowners remained strong until 1952. The 400-odd members of the royal family were collectively the largest landowners; around them there was a group of some 2,500 Egyptian families and companies, and about 200 foreign ones, who owned more than 100 *feddans* each; between them, these large owners held 27 per cent of the cultivated land. They virtually controlled the government; on average, half the ministers, senators and deputies came from this class. They were therefore able to obtain advantages in irrigation and to keep the tax-system

favourable to them. Because of their accumulated capital and access to credit, they were able to buy land when it became available, and their control of the best land made it possible to impose high rents on the tenants who cultivated most of it. Some economists were urging the need for a reform of land-tenure, and the sense of injustice was strong among the cultivators, but before 1952 scarcely a voice was raised in favour of reform in the public assemblies of the nation.

The power of the landowners also increased in Syria and Iraq during this period. In Syria, the great plains of the interior, given over to grain cultivation, had always been in the possession of leading families in the cities, but now the class of large owners was swollen by those who grew cotton on irrigated land in the Euphrates valley and those (whether they were owners or leaseholders) who grew grain in the Jazira. In Iraq, the class of large landowners to a great extent was created by changes which had occurred since the

late nineteenth century: the extension of farming with the help of tractors, pumps and irrigation works, and the transition from pastoralism to settled agriculture. The policy of the British mandatory government, and later of the 'independent' government, worked in favour of the landowners, and in particular of those of them who were tribal *sheikhs* and could use their authority in favour of the British and the monarchy. By 1958, over 60 per cent of privately owned land was in the hands of those who owned more than 1,000 *dunums*, and 49 families owned more than 30,000 *dunums* each. (The Iraqi *dunum* is equivalent to approximately 0.25 of a hectare and 0.6 of an acre.) Holdings were larger than in Egypt, because cultivation was extensive and land was plentiful, and excessive salinity tended to exhaust it quickly. Apart from tribal *sheikhs*, the landowning class included families of urban notables who had obtained land through government service or religious prestige, and Muslim merchants with capital to invest. As in Egypt, the landowners had a strong political position, through

membership of ministries and parliament and because the monarchy and ruling group needed them.

Questions & Exercises

1) How did agriculture develop in Arab countries after independence?

2) Describe the situation of landownership in Egypt before 1952. What was the political result of this situation?

3) How was the situation of landowners in Syria and before and after independence?

4) Describe, in detail, how the situation of landownership and agriculture was in Iraq before and up to 1958.

5) Why did landowners in Iraq have a strong political position before 1958? Was this situation similar to that in any other Arab country? Provide examples.

VIII. 3 Power Of The State

The triumph of nationalism may therefore have appeared at first to be that of the indigenous possessing classes, but in most countries this was short-lived, and the victor was the state itself, those who controlled the government and those in the military and civil service through whom its power was exercised. The basic social process by which the government assumed direct control over all its territories had been completed in most countries by the time the foreign rulers left, even in those like Morocco where the authority of urban governments had hitherto been weak; the independent governments inherited the means of control, armies, police forces and bureaucracies. In Saudi Arabia, too, the stronger and better organized government which 'Abd al-'Aziz bequeathed to his sons held a number of different regions in a unified political society. Only on the southern fringes of the peninsula was the process still incomplete. In Yemen, the rule of the *imam* scarcely yet extended over the whole country. The British

administration in Aden had created a loose grouping of small chieftains under British protection in the surrounding countryside, but did not govern them directly. In Oman, too, the power of the ruler, supported by the British, did not yet reach the whole of the interior from his capital at Masqat on the coast.

The activities of governments now began to extend beyond the maintenance of law and order, collection of taxes and provision of some basic services. Almost everywhere, public utilities were taken into public owner-ship: banks of issue, railways, telephones, the provision of water, gas and electricity. This was in conformity with what was happening all over the world, but there was a special reason for it here: in most countries the utilities had been owned by foreign companies, and nationalization meant both a change from private to public ownership and one from foreign to indigenous.

The movement of nationalization had its own momentum. The new governments feared the

continuation or growth of independent centres of economic power, which might generate political power or link themselves with the former rulers. Moreover, rapid industrialization would be difficult and slow if left to private enterprise: the accumulation of private capital for investment had been limited under foreign rule and was still inadequate; its direction into productive investment was difficult so long as there was no organized money-market; private investors might hesitate to put their money into new and untried industries rather than urban buildings or land; even if they did so, the factories they set up might not be those to which a national plan would give priority.

These were arguments for the intervention of the government in the economic process, and such intervention was now possible because of the accumulation of resources in its hands. The withdrawal of the foreign rulers meant that revenues from taxes were now under full control of the

governments, and the revenues were all the greater because the fiscal privileges which foreign enterprises had enjoyed were cut down. In some countries, resources for investment were now provided by the increased revenues from oil; even countries which did not possess oil might profit from payments made by companies (or transit rights, or from loans or grants given them by the richer countries. By 1960, 61 per cent of government revenues in Iraq came from oil, 81 per cent in Saudi Arabia, almost 100 per cent in the small states of the Gulf; in Syria, 25 per cent of revenue came from pipelines which carried oil Porn Iraq and Arabia to the Mediterranean coast, and in Jordan 15 per cent. Loans for development also came from the industrialized countries and from international agencies.

Questions & Exercises

1) Who was the actual ruler in most Arab countries soon after independence? Discuss with your tutor and colleagues.

2) How was the situation in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman in this regard?

3) What did the transfer of ownership to the state mean to the state and the people after independence?

4) Why were private investors reluctant to put their money into new industries after independence?

5) What was the role of oil in improving national revenues of some Arab countries? Provide examples.

VIII. 4 Other Sources Of Revenue

Even before independence, some economic activities had been brought under state control. The extraction of phosphates in Morocco had been under the control of a government agency ever since it became important; in the Sudan, the concession given to British companies to cultivate cotton in the Jazira district lapsed in 1951. After independence, the process quickened. Tunisia took over the phosphates industry, and in Jordan, too, the phosphates company had a large degree of government participation. In

Egypt, the policy of the military government which took power in 1952 moved increasingly in the direction of nationalizing factories, until it culminated in 1961 in the taking over by the state of all banks and insurance companies and almost all large industrial companies. In the previous year, the first five-year plan had been issued, with the aim of rapid industrial and agricultural growth under the control of the government. The main exception to this trend was Morocco, where, by 1960, there had appeared a clear choice between a controlled economy, with rapid industrialization and restrictions upon consumption, and an economy dependent upon private enterprise and investment. The choice involved a struggle for power between a nationalist party pressing for rapid change amid the more conservative forces gathered around the king; it ended in the assumption of direct power by the king, and a choice in favour of private enterprise. The most spectacular example of state intervention in economic processes was given not by

industry but by the reform of the system of landownership.

This had the greatest political and social importance, because most of the population of the Arab countries still lived in the countryside and also because almost everywhere the large landowners formed the most powerful class, the one which possessed most influence over the government and the most capital; to strike at its property would be to destroy a power which could control the government, and to release capital for investment elsewhere.

The first and most far-ranging scheme of land reform was announced by the new military government in Egypt soon after it took power in 1952. That a detailed plan could be put forward so soon after the seizure of power, although the matter had scarcely been discussed by previous governments or in parliament, was a sign both of the independent power of the government and of the emergence of a new ruling group with ideas very different from those

whom it had displaced. The most prominent part of the plan was the limitation of the maximum size of estates to 200 *feddans* for an individual, with an additional 100 *feddans* for his children; the maximum was lowered to 200 *feddans* in 1961, and 50 in 1969. Land above the maximum would be bought by the government at a fixed price in government bonds, and distributed to small cultivators; in addition, land belonging to the royal family was confiscated without compensation. The amount of rent which an owner could charge a tenant was limited, and tenancy agreements would last for at least three years. Tenants and smallholders would be helped to obtain credit and market their produce by co-operatives to be established by the government. In the decade which followed, about half a million *feddans* were compulsorily purchased by the state, and a part of these was distributed. The effects were far-reaching, but not always what had been expected: politically, the power of the large landowners and the royal family was broken; economically, income was

redistributed from large owners to smallholders and tenant-cultivators, while the intermediate group of medium-sized owners was scarcely touched.

In Syria, a similar measure was initiated in 1958: the maximum size of holdings was limited, agricultural contracts were redefined in the interests of the tenant or sharecropper, and a minimum wage was fixed for agricultural labourers. In the first years it could not be applied as effectively as in Egypt, because the bureaucracy was not adequate to the task, there was no full survey of title to land and the political power of the landowners was as yet unbroken. In Iraq, too, a similar measure was adopted after the military coup in 1958, but before there had emerged from the revolution a stable ruling group with clear and agreed ideas about how society should be organized; for the first few years there was disagreement among the rulers over whether the land which was taken over by the state should be held and developed by it, or should be distributed in smallholdings.

Questions & Exercises

1) What other sources of revenue did Arab states have to support their national gross income? Provide examples.

2) What did the nationalization of companies mean to the people of Egypt after the king was dethroned?

3) How was the situation of economic conflict between different parties in Morocco settled?

4) Where was land reform most effective in independent Arab states?

5) How was the land distributed in Egypt? Try to present facts and figures.

6) How was the situation of land distribution in Syria and Iraq after 1958?

VIII. 5 Rich And Poor In The City

The increasing size of the population, the migration from the countryside into the city and the growing numbers and power of the national bourgeoisie — landowners, merchants, owners and managers of

factories, civil servants and army officers — affected the nature of urban life in many ways. With the coming of independence, the indigenous middle class moved into quarters which formerly had been inhabited mainly by Europeans, and the rural migrants moved into quarters they had vacated, or into new ones. In each case, there was a change in customs and ways of life: the middle class took to living in a way which formerly had been typical of the foreign residents, and the rural migrants adopted the ways of the urban poor.

In the Maghrib, the process by which the classes with a modern education took over the centre of their cities from the foreigners had already begun before independence, in the 1940s and early 1950s. The urban segregation which had been the policy of the French protectorate in Morocco, and which existed too in Algeria and to a lesser extent in Tunisia, was breaking down, and the coming of independence carried the process further. Europeans left with their

capital, and the new rulers, the officials and the landowning and merchant classes associated with them moved in. In Cairo and Alexandria the segregation had never been so complete, but there had been quarters which had been more European than Egyptian, and the nature of these changed. The opening of the Gazira Sporting Club more fully to Egyptians, and the burning of certain buildings associated with foreigners during the riots of 1952 in Cairo, were symbols of a social change. In Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, foreign colonies had never been so large or exclusive, but in Palestine the dispossession of most of the Arab population in 1948 meant that what had formerly been mixed cities became cities mainly populated by 'Jews' of European origin; 'Jewish' immigrants from Arab countries settled mainly in new towns or villages. In Jerusalem, now divided between 'Israel' and Jordan, the Jordanian half, which included the Old City, was almost completely Arab, but a large part of the Arab bourgeoisie of Jerusalem, as of Haifa and Yafa (Java),

settled in cities outside Palestine, and it was their capital and energy which were the main cause of the rapid growth of Amman.

In their new quarters the bourgeoisie lived much as the Europeans had done, in the same kind of houses and wearing the same kind of clothes, although there might be some compromises between an old and a new way of life; a Moroccan in Casablanca might wear European clothes at business but the traditional costume, the *jallaba,* at the mosque on Fridays; a modern house might have a room furnished in the oriental style, with low divans, copper trays and wall-hangings. In some of the new quarters, members of different religious communities mingled more than they would have done in the *madina;* they lived in the same apartment blocks or streets, and their children went to the same schools.

In the openness of the new quarters, wealth could show itself more freely than in the old cities, where fear of the ruler or the neighbours led people to hide

evidence of their prosperity. Houses presented a bolder front to the street, rooms were more lavishly furnished, jewellery more openly displayed. One particular symbol of status became important in this period — the private automobile. Comparatively rare before the Second World War, it now became more common; in Cairo, the number almost doubled between 1945 and 1960. The increase in the number of cars, and also of trucks and buses, made new and wider roads necessary in city and countryside. To drive a wide boulevard through a quarter of the old city became almost a symbolic act of modernity and independence. It had first happened in the 1870s when Isma'il Pasha made Muhammad Ali Street in Cairo, and was now repeated elsewhere in the Middle East, although not in the Maghrib. Private auto-mobiles, and the roads made for them, changed the way in which the wealthier classes lived. Their lives were no longer confined to their quarter; they could possess the whole city and its rural hinterland, and they could live far from their places of work.

The quarters which the bourgeois were leaving were being taken over by rural migrants. Some of them went to the *madina,* drawn by the attraction of a famous shrine or mosque, or the existence of available lodgings: in the mixed cities, some settled in what had formerly been the quarters of the European petty bourgeoisie, such as Shubra in Cairo. In some cities, the slums and camps which already existed grew and multiplied wherever there was vacant land; but this did not happen in Cairo, where the 'City of the Dead', the vast cemeteries outside the old city, served the same purposes of housing the overflow of population. Such camps were moved from place to place by the authorities, but in course of time some of them acquired the permanent buildings and amenities of the city; the Palestinian refugee camps on the outskirts of Beirut, Damascus and Amman became virtual quarters of the city. In a few countries, governments began programmes of building low-cost popular housing, on the outer rim of the city or near the new

industrial zones. In the last decade of French rule in Morocco, a gifted city-planner tried to set up a programme of this kind; in Egypt, a five-year plan of housing was announced in 1960, including the building of a new city near Cairo, Madinat Nasr. In these years an Egyptian architect, Hasan Fathi (1900 - 89), was asking important questions about the ways in which such schemes were designed and carried out. Instead of adopting the current methods and shapes of western architecture, he suggested, it was possible to learn much from the traditions of Islamic town-planning and building.

In Cairo, Beirut and a few other cities, the ways characteristic of 'modernity', and the income needed to support them, had spread beyond a small class, and between rich and poor quarters there lay a 'transitional belt', where a petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers, small officials and skilled artisans tried to maintain middle-class standards. In most cities, however, there was a gulf between rich and poor. The

rural migrants tended to adopt the habits of the urban masses at a point where the city-dwellers might be giving them up, and so a traditional way of life was perpetuated. Women who in the countryside had worked unveiled in the fields or drawn water from the well now veiled and secluded themselves. Even at this level of society, however, there were some changes. Polygamy, which had been practised to some extent in certain social strata, became rarer, because of the difficulties of life in small apartments, or a different conception of family life. The rate of divorce was high, but may have diminished. The birthrate, although high compared with industrial countries, was lower in the city than the countryside, because girls who went to school tended to marry later, and men would try to obtain a fixed employment and save some money before marrying, and also because of the spread of birth control; in Egypt, by the late 1950s more than 50 per cent of those with higher education practised it, and about 10 per cent of the urban poor, but virtually none of the rural poor. By this time, the

problems of the exploding population were widely known and discussed in Egypt, and some of the *'ulama* declared that birth control was legitimate.

Life continued to be hard for the urban poor. A large proportion of them was unemployed. Of the population of Cairo, it was estimated that in 1960 7.5 per cent worked in industry, 23 per cent in services, and 66 per cent were without fixed or regular work. In the overcrowded quarters or camps where most of them lived, disease was widespread: the great epidemics of plague and cholera which had decimated cities in former times had now more or less disappeared, but tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria and eye diseases were common. Infant mortality was high: in the poor camps of Baghdad, it was estimated that the infant death-rate in 1956 was 341 to every 1,000 pregnancies.

There is some evidence, however, that conditions of life were improving among at least some of the poor. Tea and sugar, which had been beyond their means,

had by now become staples of life in Morocco and Iraq; the consumption of food in Egypt rose from an average of 2,300 calories a day at the beginning of the 1950s to one of 2,500 a decade later. Social services were expanding, clinics provided health services, better water supplies lowered the incidence of some diseases; in some towns public, transport was improved, a larger proportion of children went to elementary school, and anti-illiteracy campaigns were mounted. More women went to work, mainly as domestic workers or in factories; they were for the most part young and unmarried and living in the family home, and the fact that they worked outside it and earned money did not yet cause much of a change in the structure of family life; it increased the income of their families, but did not necessarily make the women workers themselves more prosperous or independent.

Such changes affected some strata of the population more than others. The gap between industrial workers

and unskilled casual workers probably grew wider. Governments began to intervene more actively in industry, to regulate conditions of work; in Egypt, a maximum working day and week were fixed by law. In most countries trade unions were now authorized; the change took place for the most part in the 1940s, under the impact of the war, then of the Labour government in Britain and left-wing parties in French coalition governments. The number of workers enrolled in unions increased as industry expanded. In Morocco and Tunisia the unions formed an integral part of the national movement, and in Egypt too workers' organizations were active in the opposition to British control after 1945. Once independence was attained, governments tried to limit the political activities of unions, but in some places they were effective in obtaining better conditions of work.

The inequalities between city and countryside were even greater than those within the city. All urban classes profited to some extent from the changing

conditions of urban life, but the improvements had scarcely begun to affect life in the villages. Most villagers in most parts of the Arab countries lived as they had always done, producing many children but seeing most of them die in infancy or youth, without medical care and with only rudimentary education, without electricity, and agricultural production normally taken by tax-collectors and merchants. This situation remained mostly as it was until agricultural reform started to take place in many Arab states. This reform, however, did not show itself until some political movements, mostly from the poorer classes and peasants, took the initiative of both the political and social change.

Questions & Exercises

1) What affected the nature of urban life in Arab states, and how?

2) Describe the social changes that took place in some Arab states soon after independence.

3) What was the effect of 'Jewish' immigration to

Palestine on the socio-economic situation there?

4) Summarize paragraph 4 in this section and comment on its content. Discuss with your colleagues.

5) How did Arab governments deal with the shortage of houses for the poorer classes moving into cities?

6) What social changes were introduced in most Arab cities on the family-life level? Provide examples.

7) What is your opinion in birth control? Discuss in class.

8) What was the socio-economic situation of the population of Cairo in the 1960s? Provide examples.

9) Mention some of the improvements introduced into the socio-economic conditions of poorer classes in some Arab countries.

10) How was economic and political reform achieved in some Arab countries? Was that necessary? Why? Discuss in class.


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==========The End==========

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