

II

Social and economic change in the "long nineteenth century"*

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Introduction

Unlike political events, social and economic processes are not amenable to periodization according to precise starting and ending-points. By their very nature, such processes do not begin at a certain moment in history, but rather mature over time; nor do they end abruptly, but rather tend to peter out gradually. Since the purpose of this chapter is to chart the main processes that took place in Egyptian society, we shall try to define a time frame that can accommodate within its loose boundaries the main social and economic developments. "The long nineteenth century" as conceived here spills over in both directions – it begins with the third quarter of the eighteenth century and ends in the first quarter of the twentieth: "just as the coming of the French in 1798 should not be thought of as a beginning, so the coming of the English in 1882 should not be thought of as an end."¹

It has been argued that if we focus on both "continuity and rupture" it is quite obvious that the period of Muhammad 'Ali should be discussed in conjunction with the second half of the eighteenth century. But at the same time, the 1860s and 1870s were a period of intense change, which mark a rupture with the past:

The expansion of European commerce, leading to the inflow of European capital, the great changes in communications with the coming of the telegraph in the 1870s, the opening of new schools, the beginning of newspapers and periodicals in the 1870s, and behind them all the demographic changes ... all these are very important, and in some ways they can be regarded as opening a new period, and one that continues far beyond 1882.²

Thus we shall look at a number of social and economic processes as they

* Regarding transliteration of Turkish names, see Note on transliteration, p. xiii.

¹ Albert Hourani, "Conclusions," *Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le Proche-Orient, L'Égypte au XIX^e Siècle* (Paris, 1982), 333.

² *Ibid.*

developed during the "long nineteenth century" with special attention to the three decades from the 1850s to the 1880s as a period of meaningful and long-range changes. However, this continuity is not regarded as a static situation, but rather as a dynamic force and a major axis of human – here Egyptian – history. The reproduction of even the same social formations is, by itself, a process requiring a great deal of human and social energy, often incorporating relatively small and routinized change, which is distinguishable from Hourani's "ruptures." Recruitment and socialization, for example, may play an important role in reproducing a certain institution, such as the Ottoman–Egyptian elite household, but they are also the very practices through which changes were introduced into the household, that cumulatively transformed it over the century.

This chapter's approach in studying processes specifically does not trace "beginnings" nor seek "early signs" of things to come. Historical phenomena are best understood and most fruitfully investigated when they have attained a "critical mass," that is when they are clearly what they are. Therefore, we will not explore the origins of private land ownership in Egypt, for example, but look at what constituted private ownership in land at various points during the period under consideration and evaluate the significance of different stages in the development of private landholding. Similarly, we shall try to understand what the state meant and did within Egyptian society, not when aspects of the state began to emerge in Egypt.

The importance of the French occupation of Egypt in 1798 is therefore considerably reduced in this analysis. The brief and intriguing rule of the French in Egypt cannot be seen as having inaugurated the modern era in Egyptian history, because it triggered political, economic, and intellectual processes, under the impact of Europe, that had transformed the country. On the contrary, such a view belittles both the fact that Egypt continued to form part of the Ottoman empire, and the role of local traditions regarding religion, thought, culture, economics, and human relations.³

Demographic and social trends

We may begin by looking at some figures that stand out when we compare the early to the later parts of the period. Since there is no reliable information for the late eighteenth century, scholars have usually begun their work from the data provided by the French scientific delegation that came to Egypt with Napoleon's forces. The population of Egypt in 1800, according to Panzac, was 4.5 million, while at the end of the nineteenth century it stood at close to 10 million.⁴ But the population growth rate was not the

³ Robert Mantran, "Avant-propos," *L'Égypte au XIX^e Siècle* (Paris, 1982), 9.

⁴ Figures and analysis in this section are based on Daniel Panzac, "The Population of

same throughout the period, reflecting the impact of other socio-economic processes and the general state of the country. A low rate was detected in the first four decades of the century, with an increase of only 0.3–0.4 percent per annum between 1800 and 1830, and no growth at all between 1830 and 1840.

With the end of Muhammad 'Ali's years of war and aggressive reforms, a return to calm in the 1840s and the success of counter-epidemic measures produced a 1 percent annual growth rate between 1840 and 1848. By the end of his reign, plague and smallpox had almost disappeared due to quarantine measures and mass vaccination. However, cholera and other diseases (such as bilharzia) surfaced and caused great loss of life and debilitation. The middle decades (1840–60) witnessed a significant rise to a sustained annual growth rate of about 1.2–1.3 percent for the remainder of the nineteenth century, reflecting profound change in living conditions. In the final analysis, despite impressive successes in fighting smallpox and the plague, the demographic structures of the Egyptian population remained virtually unchanged: high levels of birth and mortality rates (especially infant mortality), and the same rate and age of marriage.⁵

Most of the population continued to be rural, eking a living out of the land. Urbanization, in general, did not become a major feature of nineteenth-century Egypt, and the size of the urban population rose only from 8 percent in 1820 to less than 10 percent at the end of the century. However, that population was by then concentrated in two very large cities (Cairo with 570,000 and Alexandria with some 320,000, representing a 40 percent increase from 1850 to 1880), and some middle-size ones, as compared to the beginning of the century, when Cairo (with 260,000 inhabitants) was the only large city, while some 140,000 persons lived in small towns ranging from 6,000 to 20,000.⁶

There were relatively few foreign residents in Egypt at the beginning of our period, but by 1907 their number had dramatically surged to about 140,000. They flocked to the country from Europe and America in the wake of the cotton boom of the 1860s, further encouraged by the British occupation of 1882. They owned about 15 percent of the land and most of the trading and manufacturing companies.⁷ The presence of such a large

Egypt in the Nineteenth Century," *Asian and African Studies*, 21/1 (March 1987), 11–32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15–16, 19–20, 31–32. On public health and the fight against epidemics, see also LaVerne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, 1990).

⁶ Panzac, "Population of Egypt," 28–31.

⁷ E. R. J. Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820–1914: A Study in Trade and Development* (Oxford, 1969), 320–21.

foreign community and its important role in the socio-economic processes that impacted on Egypt will be discussed later.

What, then, were these processes? Although there are and have been disagreements among scholars with regard to the nature of the main social, political, and economic processes, these have tended to center around the question of hierarchy more than substance. Thus, for example, some historians have privileged economic processes over others, attributing to them greater importance than to, say, socio-cultural or "merely" political ones. It is not our purpose here to rank the various types of "continuities and ruptures" that characterize Egypt's history in the "long nineteenth century," but rather to mention and describe those major processes over which there is broad agreement in the literature.

There is hardly any doubt that such an analysis must include all of the following: the emergence of a strong and centralized state; the rise and transformation of various elites; Egypt's incorporation in the world economy and concomitant European penetration into the country; and changes in the relations between individual and society. These processes were closely interrelated, and we treat them separately only for analytic purposes; it is impossible fully to understand these phenomena without realizing that they evolved in a kind of "symbiotic relationship" to each other.

A similar approach has recently been expressed in describing the processes of transformation in the non-European world as

a type of capitalist development in which, in very general terms, expanding international trade, increasing agricultural specialization, and the beginning of modern industry act to dissolve the old solidarities and to replace them with others based on the emergence of the individual citizen as peasant, or farmer or worker, and so to the possibility of the formation of new forms of association based on class.

It was in these circumstances that the modern Middle Eastern state was created, and this calls for examination of the relations of state, nation, and religious community in terms of particular types of political and administrative forms.⁸

In adopting the approach to the history of Egypt in the nineteenth century suggested in this chapter, we avoid such metaphors and concepts as "the impact of the west" and "the European challenge and the Egyptian response." These are too one-directional and one-dimensional; we are dealing here with an *interactive* reality rather than a *reactive* one.

⁸ E. R. J. Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (London and New York, 1992), 5.

Hegemonic rule, dynastic order, and the emergence of a centralized state

A strong, centralized state in Egypt during most of the period discussed in this chapter is a very noticeable phenomenon, yet one that is not easily defined. It is difficult to conceptualize the state and its relation to society, as political theorists have pointed out. One scholar rightly contends that states are not single things, but rather “a bundle of structures, institutions, arenas, practices and claims,” adding that these bundles should be examined in concrete historical situations. This he posits in opposition to the view of the state “as autonomous, that is, as something that simply acts upon society from a position quite outside it.”⁹

The formalistic view that pits the state versus society, or civil society, as the case may be, is increasingly thought to misrepresent the actual relationship between the state and various groups – both powerful and powerless – in society. The main objection is to common formulations that describe the changes that occurred in nineteenth-century Egypt, for example, as “an ever greater centralization of power and government control *over* society,” with the state assuming more and more functions so that “social groups became *subordinated* to the demands of the state”; the bureaucratic elite is then seen as “a bridge between government *and* society.”¹⁰ The distinction between “public” (state) and “private” (society) spheres is also criticized as artificial and resulting from the state’s power to define and restrict, by coercion, “concepts of the person, the body, the family, gender,” and to consign “all these to a voluntaristically-conceived sphere of the private.”¹¹

Rather than delve any further into this theoretical discussion, we shall simply look at the main manifestations of state power within society, emphasizing that they are not separate, autonomous entities, but rather symbolically existing ones, with boundaries that are hard to define and constantly shifting, being negotiated and redrawn. At the center of the state stood the house of Muhammad ‘Ali, the source of its power and legitimacy. Beginning with the governor-general himself, hereditary rule in the Ottoman province of Egypt was extricated from the sultan and enshrined in a decree issued in 1841, as part of the settlement that ended a decade of bitter conflict between the governor and his sovereign. Muhammad ‘Ali’s heirs – ‘Abbas, Sa‘id, and Isma‘il – continued to resist the Ottomans’ attempt to annul the decree of hereditary rule, and their efforts resulted in increased

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ F. Robert Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives, 1805–1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Pittsburgh, 1984), 230 (the italics are mine).

¹¹ Bernard S. Cohn and Nicholas B. Dirks, “Beyond the Fringe: The Nation State, Colonialism, and the Technologies of Power,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1/2 (June 1988), 227, quoting O’Hanlon, p.c.

autonomy.¹² Finally, after the demise of the Ottoman empire and under British domination, the khedivate – after a brief sultanate – became a monarchy, which lasted until 1952.

The broader context of these developments takes us back to the eighteenth century and the recent scholarly debate about the nature of the socio-political order in Egypt during the second phase of Ottoman rule. It has been common in the literature to present Egyptian society in the eighteenth century as made up of Mamluk beys, Ottoman *ojaq* (Turkish *ocak*) officers, merchants, ‘ulama’, artisans organized in guilds, and peasants. In the nineteenth century, the first two groups are supposed to have been replaced by an Ottoman–Egyptian dynasty and elite, and European resident communities; the other groups remain the same, with the changes at the top having had seemingly little impact upon them. Following recent developments in the study of Egyptian elites in both centuries, an alternative model has been suggested, which we shall adopt and explicate in the following pages.

The main processes that took place in Egypt from the seventeenth century onward were similar to those that occurred in the other Ottoman provinces of the Middle East and North Africa.¹³ Rather briefly, these consisted in a dual adjustment process that emanated from the empire’s need to cope with the changing world around it and adopt a policy of decentralization. The Ottoman military–administrative elites became localized, while the local elites gradually became ottomanized. These processes were both socio-political and socio-cultural. As a result, Ottoman-local elites emerged in this vast region, which were Ottoman in outlook and orientation, but very much embedded in the provincial setting and social networks. The process as a whole was inclusivist in nature, and it enabled longstanding local notable families to bond themselves to the empire and develop both a sense of belonging and loyalty to the house of Osman.

The central government in Istanbul allowed those Ottoman-local elites a large measure of autonomy in exchange for revenue and acceptance of Ottoman sovereign privileges, which meant, *inter alia*, that Ottoman administrative structure and traditions were to be preserved, and that appointments had to be confirmed by Istanbul. The latter ensured that the central government could meddle in local affairs and protect its vital strategic interest, as defined at any given moment. With the symbols of Ottoman sovereignty intact, the sultan’s legitimizing power remained uncontested

¹² For the rise of dynastic order in Egypt, see Ehud R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-century Egypt* (Cambridge, 1990), 50–67.

¹³ For a fuller argument, see Ehud R. Toledano, “The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites (1700–1900): A Framework for Research,” in Ilan Pappé and Moshe Ma’oz (eds.), *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas, A History from Within* (London and New York, 1997), 145–62.

virtually until the demise of the empire; it was one of the most tangible assets the Ottomans held in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Ottoman government in Egypt was made up, as elsewhere, of a central administration located in the capital, Cairo, and a rural subprovincial structure (the beylicate), which appropriated the agricultural surplus and maintained law and order in the countryside. The localized garrison regiments came to be regarded as "Ottoman," while the beylicate was seen as "mamluk." In fact, both were part of the Ottoman administrative structure in Egypt, and both recruited and employed *mamluks* as well as men recruited in other ways. Mamluks and non-Mamluks crossed over from one branch to the other, established households (*kapi* in Turkish, *bayt* in Arabic), and kept varying numbers of retainers to protect and promote their interests. In other words, after the demise of the Mamluk sultanate in 1517, the *mamluk* track became just one of the methods of recruitment and socialization into the Ottoman–Egyptian elite. Thus, what is celebrated as a "Mamluk household" was actually an Ottoman provincial household, though it quite naturally possessed local characteristics (some even borrowed from Mamluk sultanate traditions), which made it an Ottoman–Egyptian household, rather than any other Ottoman household.¹⁴

The single most important factor in the process that altered the composition of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite in the first half of the nineteenth century, and significantly changed its nature, was the hegemonic standing that the household of Muhammad 'Ali achieved within the Ottoman–Egyptian elite by the year 1811. The concomitant elimination of other households as potentially destabilizing power bases also reduced the recruitment of retainers via the *mamluk* track, restricting it to the leading households of the ruler and his immediate family. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Ottoman–Egyptian elite households did not recruit *mamluks*, who became an exclusive symbol of rule. The rest of the century saw the process of elite formation develop under stable dynastic rule toward yet another "rupture" point, the opening up of the socio-political arena in the 1860s and 1870s, to be discussed further below.

The interpretation suggested here places the history of social forces and elite formation on one continuum from the Ottoman occupation in the sixteenth century to the rise of the Egyptian nation state in the twentieth century. Accordingly, the seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of an Ottoman–Egyptian elite that was gradually organizing itself around the grandee household, but it still lacked a coherent power center and no single household or faction managed to achieve hegemony. This initial period –

¹⁴ This passage represents a new interpretation of the traditional view of the beylicate as a "neo-Mamluk" phenomenon; it draws on insights provided by Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis* (Cambridge, 1997), and on my own research.

we might wish to name it the first Ottoman period – ends with the rise of the Qazdagli household to a dominant position in the first part of the eighteenth century.

The second Ottoman period in Egyptian history is marked by the consolidation of central authority, which later is only temporarily interrupted: Qazdagli hegemony peaks under 'Ali Bey al-Kabir and Muhammad Abu al-Dhahab (1760–75); comes under domestic Ottoman (1785) and then French (1789) challenges, but manages to survive under the duumvirate of Murad and Ibrahim (1779–98); it is finally broken and replaced by the hegemony of the household of Muhammad 'Ali (from 1811 on), which becomes a dynamic rule; it is then challenged by the Ottomans and the French under Abbas (until 1852), then internally by the 'Urabists (1880–82), and externally by the British (1882), but manages to survive into the present century under British rule.

During the first six years of his rule (1805–11), Muhammad 'Ali devoted a great deal of energy to the eradication of the various militias that still controlled pockets of resistance in the countryside. Once this was accomplished with much bloodshed, no armed force other than the province's army and police would operate in the province of Egypt for the entire period under discussion. Muhammad 'Ali suppressed any attempt by rural leaders and peasants to revolt, and a strict policy of law and order, especially along sensitive trade routes, was maintained by all the viceroys. When extra-legal forces tried to engage in subversive action, as when Sait plotted against 'Abbas, the matter was treated very seriously and crushed right away. Irregular forces, mostly those under Bedouin shaykhs, were either incorporated into the army as whole units or used by the government for preventing lawlessness on the margins of the towns. A "gun-control" policy was introduced during the reign of 'Abbas, but it was never fully successful.¹⁵

The mainstay of Egypt's dynastic order was a dependent and loyal ruling elite, made up of the senior office-holders in the province. Since we shall deal with this elite as a social force in the next section, let us stress here that what is often conceived as "the state" essentially consisted of the power that emanated from and was represented by the governor-general's household government. The state was practically embodied in the dynasty and the Ottoman–Egyptian elite.¹⁶ To all other parts of Egyptian society, the state was what these people did and said, and it was symbolized by how they dressed, the language they spoke (Ottoman Turkish), the carriages in which they rode, and the rest of the paraphernalia associated with their authority.

This nucleus of state apparatus gradually became what we can call a full-

¹⁵ For the Sait–'Abbas affair and the gun-control policy, see Toledano, *State and Society*, 45–46, 164–66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77–83.

fledged state bureaucracy. During the nineteenth century, the government increasingly assumed new roles and functions in promoting economic and social development. A hierarchical structure influenced by both western and Ottoman models evolved, so that by the 1870s the "old concessionary system, in which administration was carried out by autonomous social groups," was replaced by a "centralized bureaucracy." The new administrative elite consisted of technocrats with European training and an Ottoman–Egyptian outlook, but it still offered opportunities only to elite members and those on the relatively narrow mobility-affording social boundaries, while keeping out and down the rest of society.¹⁷

One of the main factors that bonded the ruler and his dependent elite – hence also one of the foundations of state power – stemmed from agricultural land, the main resource of Ottoman Egypt. From the late 1820s, land grants to members of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite became one of the main devices in binding that group to the house of Muhammad ‘Ali. Concomitantly, land ownership became a major source of elite power, especially from the third quarter of the nineteenth century onward. Since we shall discuss further below the controversy over private land ownership and elite formation, it is only necessary here to note that land ownership played an important role in the emergence of state power, in the rise of the rural notability as a propertied class, and ultimately in the rise of Egyptian nationalism. This process is often described in the nationalist narrative as emanating from the dynastic rule of the house of Muhammad ‘Ali, whose rulers gradually extended property rights in land.¹⁸

The issue of the emergence of a strong state is inevitably linked to control. However, in order again to avoid presenting the state as standing outside society and somehow imposing upon it "its" will, we use the notion of actual control together with that of the invisible, implicit permeation of patterns of state authority. Generally speaking, the dynastic rule of the house of Muhammad ‘Ali is associated with a marked increase in central authority, which manifested itself in the two categories of control. This came at the expense of alternative foci of power, mostly on the local level, in both the urban and the rural settings. Thus, for example, Muhammad ‘Ali's "unprecedented degree of control" in the countryside is seen to have reduced "traditional village autonomy," as state officials joined village shaykhs in wielding authority, especially with regard to land redistribution.¹⁹ Similarly, neighborhood, guild, and Sufi-order shaykhs – not to mention the ‘ulama’ of

¹⁷ Some of the views in this paragraph are drawn from Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives*, 230.

¹⁸ Kenneth M. Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants: Land, Society, and Economy in Lower Egypt, 1740–1858* (Cambridge, 1992), 206.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

al-Azhar – were subjected to increasing supervision and inspection by state officials.

The emergence of a strong, centralized state in nineteenth-century Egypt was greatly facilitated by the availability of European technologies and models of authority. Western transport and communication technologies were introduced into Egypt earlier, faster, and on a larger scale than in most non-European countries. The first railway line, between Alexandria and Cairo, was constructed under ‘Abbas Pasha in 1852–54, while Isma‘il Pasha expanded the network from 500 to 1,100 miles. By 1914, there were over 1,700 miles of railway in Egypt, and the Egyptian State Railways was the largest single employer in the country, with 12,000 workers. Roads were paved by European methods, linking the provinces to the capital and to the coastal and Suez Canal ports. Boat transportation was dramatically expanded with the enlargement of the irrigation system, and in Isma‘il's time alone 112 canals, totaling 8,400 miles, were dug.²⁰

With 5,000 miles of telegraph lines and a cross-country postal service, Egypt had evolved into a fairly unified territory toward the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This served to promote the expansion of the state within Egyptian society, enhancing actual, explicit control. The other side of the coin was, however, that within that dynamic and expanding network of communication, political ideas could now move with much greater ease. The expansion of literacy – from about 1 percent at the beginning of our "long nineteenth century" to about 3 percent in the middle of the period, and to about 4–5 percent in the 1880s – and the proliferation of printing and the press, served as the main vehicles for the transmission of ideas.²¹ In other words, the expansion of the state contained within itself the seeds of resistance and opposition to its growing power.

Another manifestation of the state's "explicit control" was its extensive project of registration and documentation, which was inextricably intertwined with a vast legislative program.²² The power of the state in nineteenth-century Egypt was embedded in legal projects that made it necessary to use documents to authenticate transactions, establish qualifications, and facilitate the working of the economy. Thus, for example, the land laws that were introduced from mid-century onward required documentation for transactions in land, deployed the tools with which private land ownership would later be created, and further privileged the wealthier and stronger

²⁰ Data in this paragraph is drawn from Toledano, *State and Society*, 6–15; Juan R. I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's ‘Urabi Movement* (Princeton, 1993), 110–12; and Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, 1987), 72.

²¹ Cole, *Colonialism*, 111–18; Toledano, *State and Society*, 12.

²² For a theoretical view on this, see Cohn and Dirks, "Beyond the Fringe," 227.

segments in the population (rural notables, merchants, and Europeans). It protected ownership from claims by contestants but not from the ruler.²³

Using the enormous facilities and effective tools that the state had acquired during the period under consideration, government officials tried to maximize income by harnessing the peasantry and the urban workers to its growing and oppressive appropriation machinery. The result was a rural and urban squeeze.²⁴ That squeeze was manifested in coercive conscription to the army for long years of service and wars, mainly during the reign of Muhammad 'Ali, the forced appropriation of peasant labor under the *corvée* for public works, such as irrigation and construction projects, an increased tax burden, and exploitation of urban laborers by the government through low pay and poor working conditions.

The overwhelming power of the state made resistance to abuse and exploitation quite difficult. One of the main features of the "long nineteenth century" is a marked decline in rural and urban revolts.²⁵ Many of the peasant revolts in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century occurred in Upper Egypt against excessive taxation, conscription, and the *corvée*. They were fought by masses of armed fallahin, not by guerrilla tactics, and were almost immediately crushed by the government. Only two such revolts, in 1880 and 1882 in Lower Egypt, achieved their goal, owing mainly to the extreme weakness of the government at the time of the 'Urabi crisis.²⁶

But not all resistance was organized and collective. Not infrequently, individuals resorted to evasion, flight, and sabotage at the workplace. Others yet wrote individual or group petitions, and entered into negotiations with their employers.²⁷ As we shall see, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, trade union activity began to be felt in the Egyptian labor market, mainly among transportation and textile workers. Another subversive form of resistance was the gradual penetration of the bureaucracy by groups alienated from the main processes of elite formation and the rise of the state, such as the 'ulama', who had been deprived of their teaching and judicial positions as a result of legal, educational, and administrative reforms.²⁸

Only in recent years, scholars have become sensitized to the working of the other form of control, the one defined above as "invisible." Here we refer mainly to the crucial power of the state to define and categorize, mainly through the imposition of legal categories, and the deployment of a

²³ Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants*, 203-04.

²⁴ See in detail, Toledano, *State and Society*, 181-220.

²⁵ See Gabriel Baer, *Fellah and Townsman in the Middle East: Studies in Social History* (London, 1982), 223-323.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 308-11.

²⁷ Toledano, *State and Society*, 181-95, 213-16; Cole, *Colonialism*, 174-89.

²⁸ See, for example, Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives*, 230.

system of meaning and representation dominated by sovereign and elite symbolism. By restricting the vocabulary and concepts of the person, the body, the family, and gender, and then relegating them to the private sphere,²⁹ the state shaped public discourse and subjected it to the interests of the ruling elite. To this we might add yet another means of "invisible control," namely the introduction of an all-encompassing system of discipline designed to harness the bodies and minds of the people and instill in them "implicit obedience." This was embodied in the *nizam-i cedit* (Arabic *al-nizam al-jadid*), or New Order along European lines, which began in the new army, but was especially evident in the new schooling system introduced in Egypt in the nineteenth century.³⁰

These invisible means of control were inseparably attached to the explicit ones. Explicit, naked control would not have been possible without covert deployment of the defining and inculcating mechanisms of implicit control. Only through the latter could the state produce the cultural legitimization that enabled it to rule without constantly resorting to coercion by force of arms. Thus, in a way, the state secured its legitimization through the use of technologies that enabled both control and self-constitution, as some theorists have suggested.³¹ The emergence of the strong and centralized state in nineteenth-century Egypt was made possible through effective manipulation – albeit not necessarily in a conscious way – of the two aspects of control, which fed on each other and produced social and cultural legitimacy.

Social forces and elite formation

The notion of "social forces" implies some level of group action, rudimentary organization, common purpose, and leadership. Even when group, or class, consciousness is eliminated as a necessary condition, most available analyses end up with a heavy concentration on elites. At least in the case of Egypt, almost all attempts to rectify that bias by materialist class analysis – especially with regard to the eighteenth century – have been quite unsatisfactory.³² As we move into the "long nineteenth century," the available interpretations of Egyptian social history become considerably more inclusive, and the role of non-elite groups is given its appropriate place. This has been done by combining socio-cultural explanations with insights from political economy.

At the beginning of our period, the overwhelming majority of Egyptians existed outside politics. (An Ottoman-Egyptian ruling elite, estimated at about 10,000 men and women, monopolized all political, economic, and

²⁹ Cohn and Dirks, "Beyond the Fringe," 227 (quoting O'Hanlon, p.c.).

³⁰ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge, 1988), 175.

³¹ Cohn and Dirks, "Beyond the Fringe," 228.

³² See, for example, Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism* (Austin, 1978).

cultural resources of the country.) The rest of the population made occasional forays into political history when pushed to revolt against unusual exploitation or oppression. Even then, their group actions were short lived and not very effective. [At the end of our period, an Egyptian nationalist elite – made up mainly of the remnants of the old Ottoman–Egyptian elite and a strong rural notability – and rapidly growing urban middle class and proletariat were all active in a much more expanded political, economic, and cultural arena.]

With this framework in mind, we can now chart the rise of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite under dynastic order in the nineteenth century. The Ottoman–Egyptian elite continued to be essentially an office-holding elite, and its members served in the most senior positions of the governor-general's household government (and later state bureaucracy), in the governor-general's household itself, in the agencies administering the governor-general's estates, and in the top ranks of the army. The elite (known as *zevat* in Turkish, *al-dhawwat* in Arabic) included wives, children, and freed slaves. Their rank (pasha, bey, effendi) marked their elite status and gave them access to positions that enabled many of them to acquire financial means, and later in the century also landed property.

They spoke Ottoman Turkish, their outlook was formed in an Ottoman administrative and military tradition, they dressed and behaved as their counterparts in Istanbul, identified with the empire, but were totally loyal to the house of Muhammad 'Ali, and committed permanently to serving and living in Egypt, unless political circumstances made this impossible. The ruling elite was predominantly, though not exclusively, Muslim, but it was ethnically quite diverse, making the once-prevailing categories of "Turco-Circassian" and "Turkish" obsolete. The Ottoman Christians in the elite were mainly Armenian, with some Copts and later Syrians, but a sizable group of European experts also served in the upper echelons of the administration from the time of Muhammad 'Ali.³³

Under the dynastic rule of the house of Muhammad 'Ali, we can detect three generations of high bureaucrats. The first was recruited by Muhammad 'Ali himself from among his family members, associates from Kavalla, his home town, and some skilled Armenian bureaucrats. That group served in his administration and in that of his eldest son, Ibrahim. The general outlook of this group was pro-reform and pro-Europe, but it also contained a small ideological opposition, which was critical of the pace and scale of reform. The latter group centered around 'Abbas Pasha, who came to power in 1848, after the death of Ibrahim.

Because 'Abbas mistrusted the personally loyal and reformist elite re-

³³ For a detailed explanation of the makeup and character of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite, see Toledano, *State and Society*, 16–18, 68–93.

cruited by his grandfather, his ascent to power also signaled a generational change within the Ottoman–Egyptian elite. Hence, the second generation emerged after the struggle for power between 'Abbas and Ibrahim's sons in the early 1850s, reached its peak during the reign of Isma'il, and had disappeared by the early 1890s. The third generation consisted of second-generation sons, who had received a different, much more Europeanized education; it lasted well into the twentieth century and played a role in the rise of the nationalist movement and the modern nation state of Egypt.³⁴

The second generation of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite began to amass large landed property, as a result of land grants by the rulers. The latter were interested in regenerating income from estates that had fallen into tax arrears, but they later used land grants as a means of bonding elite members to them. However, with the dramatic intensification of European penetration during the mid-1870s, which saw the introduction of the Dual Control system, the direct links now forged between the land-owning elite and foreign economic interests enabled the Ottoman–Egyptian elite to trade its dependence upon the ruler, Isma'il, for dependence on the European powers. It has been argued that the loss of elite support since 1875 was one of the major factors that ultimately facilitated the deposition of Isma'il by Anglo-Ottoman consent in 1879.³⁵

Before we look more closely at the changes that occurred during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, let us describe the socio-cultural process that took place within Egyptian society during that period. The main groups concerned in this context were the peasantry, the rural notability, the urban commercial, intellectual, and administrative elites, and the urban workers, artisans, small traders, and the poor. Each of these subcultures had a distinct core, but their peripheries overlapped in varying degrees. Thus, for example, core members of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite spoke Turkish and were literate, shared the values and heritage of Ottoman elite culture, were mostly, though not exclusively, Muslim, and came from various ethnic origins. As the century progressed, more elite members were born and raised in Egypt. Further from that core, lower-level bureaucrats and army officers had lower income, small or no land holdings, and a more restricted access to power. But they, too, were considered Ottoman gentlemen, and their wives were classified as Ottoman ladies, with all that these notions implied in dress and etiquette. Ottoman–Egyptian elite culture was imperial, universal, and Istanbul oriented, but Cairo–Alexandria based.³⁶

Despite the internal differentiation between its core and periphery, the

³⁴ The last two paragraphs are based on Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives*, 82–83, and Toledano, *State and Society*, 41–49.

³⁵ This view is elaborated in Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives*, 179–226. Cf. Cuno, *The Pasha's Peasants*, 203–04.

³⁶ This and the following paragraphs draw mainly on Toledano, *State and Society*, 16–18.

Ottoman–Egyptian elite was fairly homogeneous. The cores of the other elites were also fairly well defined, with rich merchants and high ‘ulama’ almost exclusively Arabophone and oriented toward Egypt itself. The non-elite subcultures encompassed over 95 percent of the population, and – almost by definition – were much more diffuse, and the core’s common denominator was broad, though still quite meaningful and distinguishable. All core members of the non-elite subcultures spoke Arabic and, with the exception of the low ‘ulama’, were mostly illiterate, and their culture was immersed in the local setting, replete with themes and images of both rural and urban life in the Nile valley. Most core members of non-elite groups were born in Egypt, and were either Muslim or Copt. Within the Egyptian–Arab culture, the distinction between the various elite and non-elite groups was mainly material, though elite groups were more culturally affected by Ottoman–Egyptian elite culture as a result of frequent interaction.

The most significant and dynamic socio-cultural process in nineteenth-century Egypt occurred along the boundaries between the Ottoman–Egyptian elite and those groups most closely bordering on them. It was there that negotiation was taking place, offering a real dynamic of change and mobility. From the 1840s onward, but perhaps most dramatically in the third quarter of the century, a dual process was in motion: members of the Egyptian–Arab elites, especially the rural notability, were allowed to enter the officer ranks of the army and receive appointments in the rural, and gradually also in the central, administration. With time, they rose to be provincial governors, heads of bureaus and ministries, and army colonels, becoming full members of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite. Simultaneously, and while elite ranks were being broadened, a “dilution” of the core components occurred, with the incorporation of more elements from Egyptian–Arab culture at the expense of Ottoman ones.

This dual process – inclusivist by its very nature according to Ottoman tradition – transformed the Ottoman–Egyptian elite toward the last part of the “long nineteenth century.” At the turn of the century, the ruling elite was an Egyptian one, with a strong Ottoman–Egyptian heritage nevertheless, but now fully embroiled in the production of an Egyptian nation state. Many of its core members spoke Turkish and felt a close affinity to Istanbul, but Arabic predominated even in the administration, and certainly in intellectual and economic life. The failure, in early 1881, of core Ottoman–Egyptian officers to stage a coup against the rising power of the ‘Urabists removed the last obstacle on the way to equality in both the army and the bureaucracy between the native Egyptian notable sons and core Ottoman–Egyptians.³⁷ Interaction between the political elite and the commercial and intellectual ones, with full social mingling and exchange, became easier and

³⁷ On this, see Cole, *Colonialism*, 276.

quite common; it finally produced the monarchical elite of the interwar period.

The leading figures in the old Ottoman–Egyptian elite gradually disappeared: Sultan Pasha died in 1884, and Sharif Pasha in 1887; ‘Ali Pasha Mubarak retired in 1891, and Nubar Pasha left the government in 1894. In the administration, the British promoted and further recruited members of minorities, such as Syrians and Copts, and English advisors from British universities.³⁸ But, at the same time, non-elite groups were gradually using the new educational system deployed by Isma‘il to gain access to resources and junior positions in the army and administration. Early in the twentieth century, this would be the basis for an emerging *effendiyya* middle class.

In retrospect, there can hardly be any doubt that the 1860s and 1870s qualitatively transformed Egyptian society in a way that launched it into the twentieth century and the age of colonialism and nationalism. Historical explanations of the processes that took place during that period have led most scholars to tie them to the events of 1881–82, the ‘Urabi movement, and the British occupation. Broadly speaking, most writers on the topic have concentrated on the last phase of Isma‘il’s rule – the second half of the 1870s – as precursor to the events leading to the British occupation in 1882.³⁹ Their explanations are largely socio-economic, grounded in both class analysis and dependency theories. A recent contribution to that debate has taken a long-term approach, seeking the roots of the ‘Urabi movement in the processes that had taken place not merely in the preceding half decade, but rather in the preceding quarter of a century.⁴⁰

In that approach, economic, social, and cultural processes during the period 1858–82 created within Egyptian society “challenger strata” that were ripening toward a revolution. The weakening of the state security apparatus, perceived interests, a fairly high degree of social organization, means of communication, and a uniting discourse were the conditions those strata needed in order to act. When they did, in the early 1880s, they tried to change the existing distribution of power within society. European penetration, as already mentioned, created the conditions that enabled a community of discourse to emerge through which political ideas, revolutionary in this case, were carried. Population growth and an ensuing pressure on land, and an acceleration in Egypt’s incorporation into the world economy, provided a fertile background to the development of opposition to khedival rule, even among members of the Ottoman–Egyptian elite.

³⁸ Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives*, 229.

³⁹ See, for example: Alexander Schölch, “The Formation of a Peripheral State: Egypt 1854–1882,” *L’Egypte au XIX^e Siècle*, 176–85; Abd El-Azim Ramadan, “Social Significance of the ‘Urabi Revolution,” *ibid.*, 187–94; and Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives*, 227–30.

⁴⁰ Cole, *Colonialism*, esp. 273–82.

