

# The Colonial State and Its Multiple Relations: A Case Study of Egypt

Saad Abi-Hamad

It is strange to imagine that less than a century ago a handful of European countries held sway over vast portions of the world's peoples. It is yet harder to imagine from a modern-day perspective just how so much of the world's population acquiesced to European colonial rule. How this seemingly unmanageable feat was accomplished cannot but illicit a high degree of intellectual curiosity. To satisfy this curiosity and to answer some of these puzzling questions, I examine in this essay the functioning of the colonial state. More specifically, I investigate the nonwhite British colonial state in Egypt, which lasted from the conquest of Egypt in 1882 through its nominal independence in 1922. The colonial state is unique such that it possesses enough peculiarities to warrant a classification separate from the traditional nation-state. Yet even in the case of works by Timothy Mitchell, who studies both colonial and postcolonial Egypt, the uniqueness of the colonial state is not thoroughly discussed from all angles.<sup>1</sup> This essay builds on a seeming consensus among authors such as Mitchell, Finn Stepputat, and Joel Migdal on the need to consider the multiple points of interaction between generally heterogeneous states and societies. The primary concern here is how the colonial state manufactures consent, collaboration, or, at the bare minimum, acquiescence for its rule in the absence of a social contract. Answering this question also leads to an understanding of the attendant issue of the multiple relationships the colonial state had to maintain. Over the course of this essay, a portrait emerges of an Egyptian colonial government that employed all the tools at its disposal, from outright violence to far more subtle shows of benevolence, in order to manufacture consent and preserve authority. It also becomes readily apparent as this essay unfolds that the colonial state had to sustain a relationship with its colonized subjects while at the same time concerning itself with the attitudes and opinion of an increasingly democratic home society. To provide a wider comparative lens and give greater depth to the analysis of the colonial state in British Egypt, this essay makes frequent references to the literature on the British colonial state in India.

To provide clarity, the discussion that follows is organized into three major sections: an exposition of what is meant by the colonial state and its various components, a discussion on justification and the search for legitimacy in British Egypt, and an examination from primary source material on the successful management of the colonial state. This last section, a case study of the consul generalship of Sir Eldon Gorst, helps demonstrate how justification,

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

1. There exists a rich and diverse literature on relations between colonizer and colonized, although not specifically on the functional aspects of the colonial state. Among those are classics

such as Albert Memi, *Colonizer and Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (Boston: Beacon, 1965); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

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legitimacy, and, most crucially, the careful management of relationships with multiple societies were directly relevant to the smooth operation of the colonial state in British Egypt.

### Defining the Colonial State

When considering the colonial state, especially as it existed in Egypt from 1882 through 1922 in the form of what was known as the “dual government” system, it is difficult to locate an applicable definition of state under which to classify it. The colonial state in this particular sense was made up of the “colonial government” of the Anglo-Egyptian officials and the “native government” of the native elites and the Egyptian ruler (the khedive).<sup>2</sup> Yet it was the colonial government that exercised paramount authority, or imperium, in this particular context. Hence one can hardly imagine the colonial state in the transcendental terms that Edward Shils would employ to describe the “center” or “central institutions” as the embodiment of the people and where “most of the population (the ‘mass’) now stands in closer relation to the center.”<sup>3</sup> The colonial state is obviously and clearly subject to extranational control, or more accurately extranational paramount influence bordering on control, and hence cannot be the embodiment of the people or the nation.

Should one then turn to Max Weber’s widely used definition of the state? In Weber’s estimation, “A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>4</sup> Such a definition could only apply to the colonial state should it be considered the “legitimate” purveyor of force within the territory it controls; however, given the ever-so-crucial point that the colonial state was an alien creation lacking popular consent, religious legitimacy (a point of considerable importance

in a Muslim nation such as Egypt), or even the empowerment conveyed by tradition within the society over which it rules, then from where—or how—can it claim legitimacy? In the context of the colonial state in Egypt, the exercise of violence was rationed between the subordinate native government and the controlling colonial Anglo-Egyptian government. In this scenario it was the subordinate and inferior native government that could claim legitimacy, and hence only by recourse to elaborate ruses of continued occupation-by-invitation of said sovereign, to use the term loosely, could the Anglo-Egyptian-controlled colonial state be deemed legitimate.<sup>5</sup> This convoluted arrangement bore echoes to earlier British experiences in India. The East India Company derived its original authority to collect taxes in the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa from a Mogul divan or royal charter. That was the source of British legitimacy in India, and yet by “the summer of 1813 it had become clear . . . that the great Mughal had been made a virtual prisoner on his throne by the British.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, “inconsistency and ambiguity” haunted the relationship between the Moguls—the nominal legitimate rulers of India—and the British. These “contradictions of legitimacy” would only be resolved when after “the mutiny and rebellion of 1857 . . . the last emperor . . . was tried as ‘a subject of the British Government in India,’ and a ‘false traitor against the State.’”<sup>7</sup> No such clean and final ruptures affected the British-Egyptian relationship, and hence questions surrounding contradictions of legitimacy remained unresolved.

What then happened, as was quite often the case in Egypt, when the colonial government and the native government were in open conflict? Did the colonial state retain even technical legitimacy in those instances when its two halves were at odds?<sup>8</sup> One can then clearly see

2. The term *Anglo-Egyptian* refers to English officials who had made Egypt their home and not to a combined group of Anglos and Egyptians.

3. Edward Shils, “Mass Society and Its Culture,” *Daedalus* 89 (1960): 288–314. See also Edward Shils and Michael Young, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1975), 288.

4. “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright-Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.

5. The 1840 Treaty of London had vested the rule of Egypt in Muhammad Ali (its de facto ruler at the time) and his descendants. In 1867 Muhammad Ali’s descendants would be granted the title of “khedive” or high prince by the Ottoman sultan.

6. Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi.

7. *Ibid.*, xii.

8. The matter is yet further complicated by the nominal Ottoman suzerainty over Egypt and hence an alternate source of legitimization that could be invoked by the colonial government before 1914. At the outbreak of World War I, Britain proclaimed Egypt a protectorate and severed it from even nominal Ottoman suzerainty, rendering the hitherto de facto sovereigns of Egypt, but for the British imperium, full sovereigns (the contradiction in this statement is obvious to the author and intentionally retained).

that such a definition, which identifies the party with the “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force,” leaves us with more questions than answers in the case of the colonial state.<sup>9</sup>

Newer definitions of the state such as those presented by Migdal initially appear to hold some promise for helping us place the colonial state within the wider family of states. In attempting to provide a new definition of the state, Migdal acknowledges that there exists in any human society “multiple systems of rules,” among which there exists “negotiation, interaction and resistance.”<sup>10</sup> Such a sophisticated description that eschews the vision of the state as a monolithic and omnipotent actor holds a great deal of promise for understanding the state. Yet even within the bounds of such an expansive conception of the state, the colonial state cannot find a home, for apart from being “the field of power marked by the use of the threat of violence,” the state, according to Migdal, is also in part an entity that “is shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people by the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practice of its multiple parts.”<sup>11</sup> Although meeting many of the components of this sophisticated definition, the colonial state in which the colonial government exercises imperium, as was the case in British Egypt, can never be a “representation of the people.”

In all fairness to these theorists, their concerns are with the postcolonial or modern state, and hence the colonial state is somewhat out of their purview. A much more thorough discussion of the nature of the colonial state emerges out of the work on African colonialism by Crawford Young.<sup>12</sup> Young, counted among the most prominent scholars of the colonial state in Africa, notes that the colonial states lacked three crucial attributes of a proper state: “sovereignty, nation, [and] external actor.” In short, the colonial state does not enjoy proper sovereign power, an attribute reserved for the “colonizing state” (the metropol); it actively in-

tervenes in the formation of a nation as it fears the attendant “overtones of self-determination”; and, ultimately, it “was not an actor in the international scene,” but “at most . . . occasionally a stage hand.” Despite these missing attributes, Young would “affirm the colonial polity’s standing as a state” (43). The most salient feature of the colonial state was “the institutionalization of agencies of domination that at once perpetuated rule and upheld the polity’s categorization as other” (44). This process of categorizing the colonized as Other is an absolute crucial ingredient in the process of creating and maintaining the colonial state. This is largely due to the fact that as “the metropolitan populations now enjoy[ed] an array of participative entitlements and constitutional protections as ‘citizens,’ there was a dramatic sharpness in the status differential between colonial subject and colonizing civil society.” However, concurrent with this disparity was that the “legitimation imperative of the colonizer now included a requirement of justification of colonial conquest to a much larger audience than simply the merchant interests, clerics, and restless aristocrats who had been interested partners in an earlier age” (74). In other terms, imperial rule and colonization now required the approval of an ever-growing mass of Englishmen, and eventually Englishwomen. Although broadly agreeing with these concepts as presented by Young, especially regarding the concern that the colonial state had for the public opinion at home and its active “othering” of the colonized, a process by which common experiences of the colonized and Britain’s working class were effaced, the present discussion differs markedly from Young’s on certain issues. First, it must be noted that in defining the colonial state this essay pays particular attention to the dual government system and its two components: the colonial government and the native government. Without referencing these two components, an entire level of complexity in the relationship between colonizer and colonized and the location of sovereignty

9. This is especially the case when the growth of a popularly supported nationalist movement could theoretically be deemed to have shifted the preexisting “social contract” to the popularly supported nationalist movement, which was more often the target of violence than a monopolizer of it.

10. Joel Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

11. *Ibid.*, 16.

12. See Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

is left unaddressed. Second, as the present argument unfolds, it places far greater emphasis on atavistic medieval impulses, leftovers from Europe's age of feudalism, which by Young's account were "effaced by modern ideologies of the state" (71). This essay not only argues that these medieval feudal impulses remained in evidence but also demonstrates how they would shape the aforementioned interaction between colonizer and colonized in British Egypt. In actuality, this dynamic repeated itself all over the nonwhite colonies of the British Empire.

### Justification and the Search for Legitimacy in British Egypt

It is worth noting that among the theorists of modern empire, economist Joseph Schumpeter famously described imperialism as an "atavism," or a relic of an earlier feudal age.<sup>13</sup> To his mind, imperialism occurred because the inheritance of modern Europe "included the war machine . . . and because a class oriented toward war maintained itself in a ruling position. This class clung to its domestic interest in war, and the pro-military interests among the bourgeoisie were able to ally themselves with it. This alliance kept alive war instincts and ideas of overlordship, male supremacy, and triumphant glory—ideas that would have otherwise long since died."<sup>14</sup> Simply put, in the course of expanding and ruling an empire, war was inevitable. War, the stock-in-trade of the old military feudal aristocracy, enabled them to remain relevant long beyond the point when modern governments and capitalist economies should have rendered them obsolete. Although in the present time Schumpeter's observations on the nature of imperialism do not enjoy great circulation, they bear direct relevance on the nature of the colonial state and its relations with the colonized society. If one accepts Schumpeter's argument, and agrees that imperialism is an atavistic relic of the feudal autocratic age, contrary to what Young argues about the modern imperialism of the late nineteenth century, then in the empire's colonies, especially its non-

white colonies such as British Egypt, one would see the full expression of this autocracy. In fact, were one to address once again Rudyard Kipling's famous line on the "white man's burden" published in 1899, and the sentiment behind it, one would undoubtedly see echoes of noblesse oblige and all the superiority and condescension that it implies.<sup>15</sup> Yet these attitudes, even if dominant among the agents of Empire, could not escape the scrutiny and oftentimes criticism of modern political society at home and abroad. This dichotomy between an atavistic class of imperial agents and the modern political society at home was what made the process of othering so necessary. In the context of the forthcoming case study, the lengths to which the colonial government would go to control public opinion at home is fully discussed, hence dramatically highlighting what this essay has been arguing about the multiple relations of the colonial state.

It would benefit the discussion at this point to consider the issue of "state-society relations" and the concept of popular sovereignty. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the British concept of political society would expand and become progressively more inclusive of broader swaths of the population. For this reason, colonial rule, absolute and autocratic, cannot but stand as a contradiction to the very image of the British as lovers of liberty and tutors of civilized Western governance. To dismiss the impact of political ideology in Britain from developments in the rest of the empire would be to create an artificial and misleading separation. Indeed, recent scholarship on the foundation and evolution of the British imperium in India has noted that the "issues of popular sovereignty and limits on the exercise of power, which had been familiar liberal concerns, would now be raised in the context of the extended empire as well."<sup>16</sup> This concept of popular sovereignty carries with it implications of a relationship between state and society, which in the context of the colonial state is markedly bifurcated. The colonial government, which along with

13. See Joseph Schumpeter, "The Sociology of Imperialisms," in *Imperialism and Social Classes* (1919), trans. Heinz Norden (1955; repr., New York: Meridian, 1966).

14. *Ibid.*, 213.

15. See Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *McClure's Magazine* 12 (1899).

16. Sen, *Distant Sovereignty*, 12.

the native government formed the two components of the colonial state as it existed in Egypt, maintained relations with not one society but two. Those were the native society over which it ruled and British political society, which elected the British governments to which the colonial state answered. This situation bore great resemblance to the situation in India in the late nineteenth century, to which Lord Robert Lytton, the British viceroy from 1876 through 1880, was driven to remark exasperatedly on the “great difficulty of working . . . a despotic executive in India without bringing it into collision with a democratic legislature in England.”<sup>17</sup> This concern that colonial officials expressed regarding the elected British legislature, and indirectly the British electorate, greatly complicates questions regarding source of authority, legitimacy, and the avowed versus actual concerns of the colonial government.

This uneasy relationship between natives and the British had real consequences for the British colonial government in Egypt, as native nationalists and reformers consequently derided and attacked the British for inconsistency and hypocrisy on those grounds. The Egyptian nationalist and owner of the newspaper *Al-Liwa*, Mustafa Kamil, would tirelessly seek to address the public in Egypt and abroad, forever striving to assert the presence of educated and civilized Egyptian voices. He wished not only to highlight the inconsistency of British principals on governance with British colonial practices but also to negate the arguments of the colonized as a primitive and ignorant people in need of tutelage: “Should we say these things to the English nation and make it understand that we do not hate the English but hate the occupier since he occupies us, even had he been the closest person to us [we would hate him], because we are a civilized nation who wish to rule ourselves.”<sup>18</sup> This theme was picked up again in a speech presented in French to a gathering of European residents in Alexandria on 13 April 1896. “Is our

struggle against the English nation? No, our struggle is not against it, but against a group of individuals who work to perpetuate the occupation indefinitely, for personal reasons.”<sup>19</sup> Kamil believed his struggle to be with a very specific imperial faction, and that made him even more eager to speak to the English nation and English political society directly. To that end, in 1906 he would actually produce an English-language version of his newspaper, the *Standard* (a literal translation of the Arabic *Al-Liwa*), to carry his message to the liberal and progressive English. That same year, shortly after the Denshawai incident, an altercation between a British hunting party and Egyptian peasants, and its aftermath in the form of brutal retributions against the peasants involved, Kamil visited London to object to the sentencing and to capitalize on the large outcry in Egypt and abroad against the brutal punishment the villagers had received.<sup>20</sup> His visit was quite eventful, as he was well received by the orientalist in England and was sought after by newspapers and politicians. In all these attempts to address the British public, Kamil demonstrates a clear understanding of what this essay has been presenting as a key feature of the colonial state. He understood the extent to which the colonial government was concerned with the opinions of its home society and just how important it was for the colonial government to maintain its relations with that society. He perceived the bifurcation that was earlier noted in this article. He comprehended that to achieve his goal of British withdrawal he had to disrupt the dual relationships maintained by the colonial state, the relationship with the home society as well as that with the native society. The colonial government’s high-handedness and autocratic methods provided him with the means necessary to make common cause among the English and, more broadly, British liberals, especially Irish members of parliament who regarded such behavior as a direct threat to their own liberties.

17. Lord Lytton to Stanhope, 9 May 1878, quoted in M. J. Cowling, “Lytton, the Cabinet, and the Russians, August to November 1878,” *English Historical Review* 76 (1961): 70 n. 4, quoted in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 7.

18. Murcus Yuakim Rizq, ed., *Awraq Mustafa Kamil: Al-Khutub [The Papers of Mustafa Kamil: The Speeches]* (Cairo: The Egyptian Public Institution for the Book, 1992), 102.

19. *Ibid.*, 109.

20. The altercation between a British hunting party and the villagers of Denshawai had led to the injury of one British officer and his later death from exposure. The punishments meted out by the court had included hangings, floggings, and imprisonment.

The colonial state is in essence a hybrid institution. I use this term because the colonial state carries out much or all of the same functions of any other state, even in cases where it rules from behind a local facade while at the same time is removed from society. It is after all an alien presence. While it rules primarily by right of conquest and does not necessarily derive legitimacy from local popular consent, it does strive to provide some moral and legal justification for its presence. The British Empire took pains to make recourse to arguments of moral duty and obligation, so famously—or infamously—encapsulated in Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden.” As Evelyn Baring, the Earl of Cromer, so eloquently, if pompously, remarked, “[The Englishman] came not as a conqueror, but in the familiar garb of a saviour of society.” The Englishman “was convinced that his mission was to save Egyptian society, and, moreover, that he was able to save it”; indeed, why not, for he possessed “all the confidence of an imperial race” that had “done it before now.”<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the justification used, for the continuation of its rule the colonial government undoubtedly required at least a degree of local consent and collaboration. It must be understood that in the case of many nonwhite colonies, such as Egypt and certainly India to give just two examples, where the European presence was in fact miniscule in comparison to the native population, the long-term maintenance of violent repressive measures was impractical. Force alone could not sustain rule over the colonies in the face of long-term determined opposition, for if nothing else, the cost of maintaining military operations would necessitate an end to the colonial presence. This acknowledgment is no way an attempt to imply that the foundation of the British colonial state in Egypt did not rest on the threat of military force, but by itself, military force cannot explain the relatively peaceful maintenance of this rule.

Besides its extraction by brute force, collaboration, consent, and acquiescence could be purchased. I imply not a direct cash exchange but rather a general economic advancement that

improves the material situation of the native society in a marked way. This was the case during the early stages of Lord Cromer’s tenure as consul general in Egypt (1883–1907). However, no ruler can ever count on continued economic prosperity, for financial downturns cannot be avoided, and a severe economic crisis would actually haunt Gorst’s initial tenure as consul general (1907–11). If one dismisses brute force as a practical means or policy for long-term colonization, and acknowledges the impracticality of relying solely on progressively improving economic conditions, then it behooves one to examine what other methods the colonial state used to manufacture collaboration or compliance.

To complicate matters further, one must understand that even if the colonial state were totally immune from the desires of the local populace (which, as mentioned above, it was not), it must justify itself to the society and government in the home country. Hence it is fair to argue that the colonial state must have relations with multiple societies, the indigenous society it oversees and the society from which it emerged. This relation is crucial to understanding the colonial state. Although in many cases the colonial state is autocratic, and is shaped by the personality of the colonial governor, it has a higher authority to whom it must answer. So in the case of the British Empire, the colonial state must answer to the British government and to British society. Hence the colonial state is extremely concerned with opinions at home, often even to the detriment of relations with native society.

To test the veracity of the observations made so far, I will examine the private writings and official communiqués of Gorst, the British agent in Egypt. My intent is to determine his understanding of the position of the colonial state vis-à-vis the society over which it ruled as well as the actions he took to facilitate relations. This examination should yield insight into not only the personality of one of the most prominent and, I would argue, brilliantly Machiavellian colonial administrators in Egypt but also the nature of the colonial state and the multiple relationships it had to maintain.

21. Evelyn Baring, Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1908), 2:123, 124, 130.

### Sir Eldon Gorst: An Examination of the Management of Society in the Colonial State

Long before his ascension to the highest position in the Anglo-Egyptian government, Gorst understood the importance of controlling public opinion. However, in keeping with previous observations on the need of the colonial state to maintain relations with two separate societies, he sought to control public opinion in Britain as well as in Egypt. With the facilitation and encouragement of Cromer, Gorst began submitting articles on Egypt to the London *Times* in 1890 while working for the colonial government in British Egypt. In fact, the managing editor of the *Times*, C. F. Moberly Bell, had been that news organ's correspondent in Egypt, and he would continue a regular correspondence with Cromer. They accordingly saw themselves as "conspirators for the good as they saw it of Greater Britain."<sup>22</sup> By special arrangement Gorst's identity was kept secret by the newspaper, since Cromer could not officially condone a government employee taking such actions, but Gorst and other specially chosen correspondents worked to control the flow of information from Egypt to England. Secrecy was crucial, but in a letter to Moberly Bell he would remark, "But could I not turn my head staunchly in the opposite direction and know nothing about it!" The end result was to control the flow of information to the British public, and as Cromer explained to Moberly Bell, Gorst as the *Times* correspondent in Egypt was expected to "make discreet use of any information not available to the general public" and to be certain "not to send anything which would be seriously embarrassing to [him] or the English Gov't."<sup>23</sup> When Cromer did not control the correspondents directly, he sought to have them submit their material to the agency staff for vetting and editing before they were ever forwarded to London, and he was not above using threats or intimidation to achieve this end.<sup>24</sup> Subsidies were also employed to control the flow of news, and no more glaring example can be cited than the

annual subvention to Reuters, the paramount British news service. This subvention continued to be paid for three years after Cromer's departure, through most of the duration of Gorst's tenure as consul general.<sup>25</sup>

In 1907 Cromer's seemingly unending tenure in charge of Egypt finally came to an end, and his protégé, Gorst, now aged forty-six, returned to Egypt, having been handpicked and promoted by Cromer to succeed him as consul general. The situation in Egypt upon Gorst's return was extremely unstable. The Denshawai incident had soured relations with much of the Egyptian populace. Just as importantly, the efforts of Egyptian nationalists such as Kamil had succeeded in embarrassing the colonial government and raising questions back in England. The Nationalist Party Kamil had founded shortly before his death in 1907 had gained prominence and popular support, rendering it a force to be reckoned with. In addition, Gorst commented that as Cromer's position and his health had worsened, his oversight had slackened. Hence he found Egypt in a state of "administrative anarchy," for "the whole machine of government absolutely depended on one man, and that man had been going to pieces physically and morally."<sup>26</sup> Gorst had inherited a government and state mired in myriad difficulties. British Egypt was in serious economic straits, the native ruler was vehemently anti-British, and the nationalist movement had mushroomed. Despite these difficulties Gorst managed to satisfactorily stabilize the Egyptian colonial state without a marked increase in British troop levels. His first year as consul general was generally accounted an unequivocal success. Gorst drew the khedive away from the nationalists; he hobbled the nationalists and effectively muzzled their presses, including *Al-Liwa*. Even as criticism mounted and Gorst admitted that "the lines upon which the country was being run met general disfavour," he could still take satisfaction that "nevertheless [his policies] at-

22. Peter Mellini, *Sir Eldon Gorst: The Overshadowed Proconsul* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1977), 33.

23. Evelyn Baring to C. F. Moberly Bell, 11 May 1890 (Very Private), Charles Moberly Bell Papers, Archives of *The Times*, London; quoted in Mellini, *Sir Eldon Gorst*, 34.

24. *Ibid.*, 37.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Sir Eldon Gorst, autobiographical notes, 1:111, Gorst Collection, Middle East Centre (MEC) Archive, GB165-00122, box 10, St. Antony's College, Oxford.

tained their object of taking the sting out of the local Anglophobia, and at the same time, from the House of Commons' point of view, had the desirable result of pushing the Egyptian questions well into the background."<sup>27</sup> Hence even criticism and disfavor would be managed to attain the desired objective of preserving the British colonial state in Egypt. It would be exceedingly difficult to locate a better case study than Gorst's early tenure in Egypt to illustrate the various methods of management and manipulation that allowed for the continuous existence of the colonial state.

Ironically, this early successful management comes into even sharper contrast if considered against the difficulties Gorst would encounter later in his tenure as consul general. His major setback occurred when he failed to properly account for and manage either the Egyptian or the British response when he sponsored a proposal to extend the Suez Canal concession. His proposal was rejected by the Egyptian assembly of notables that he himself had unnecessarily convened in a fit of hubris, some might say, while not accounting for its rejectionist mood. At home he was attacked by those who sought to have the canal returned to the Egyptians in the expectation that a militarily weak Egypt could be browbeaten into accepting lower tolls on British shipping. Gorst would, however, successfully bounce back, and this particular failure is for the purpose of this essay as equally informative as his earlier successes. His successful management and manipulation of the various components of the colonial state at the beginning of his tenure allowed him to overcome early difficulties, while his inability to do so during the debate over extending the Suez concession resulted in a failure to achieve his objectives. By calling the assembly of notables into session, he had put in doubt in the Egyptian mind the location of sovereignty and undermined the collaborative khedive. Furthermore, he had mismanaged the relations with both the native and the British political societies. These difficulties clearly demonstrate just how important it was for the colonial state to properly allocate sovereignty and to maintain or manipulate

its plural relationships with the British and the colonized societies.

Gorst differed slightly in style from Cromer in that he was willing to invest some time and effort in smoothing over relations with the khedive and pashas of Egypt. Gorst by no means intended any lessening of British control over Egypt; rather, he thought to use intelligently the Egyptians themselves as tools to further that control. As he noted in 1893:

My own view is that we ought to decline to incur the responsibility of recommending to the Khedive this or that minister. I should leave the choice to him absolutely, at the same time warning him that he would be held more or less responsible for the selections, and that the only thing we must insist on would be that the man chosen would work cordially with us. If we took up this line, the Khedive I fancy would be pleased at the idea of appointing his own ministers, and at the same time his influence would be on the side of making them go along with us: and as there is no doubt that if Effendim [Abbas] wishes it, any minister will get along with us.<sup>28</sup>

Armed with what appeared to be a British government mandate to liberalize the Egyptian political scene, and driven by his personal belief in the superiority of the more subtle approach indicated in the quotation above, Gorst set to work. His first step was to improve relations with the khedive, Abbas Hilmi II, a former friend. This quickly paid dividends, as Abbas distanced himself from the Nationalist Party and began earnestly working with Gorst. He then encouraged the appointment of Boutros Ghali, a Copt, to the post of prime minister and the reappointment of Saad Zaghlul to the Ministry of Education. Both appointments were intended to provide him with competent and collaborative administrators, who could at the same time weaken the Nationalist Party. All in all he sought to "avoid stirring up contentious [emotions] and providing new points of attack for the National Party in Egypt or hostile antics in the House of Commons."<sup>29</sup> Once again, one sees clearly the bifurcated nature of the colonial state that this article has repeatedly alluded to. Two societies, and two relationships, had to be constantly

27. *Ibid.*, 1:126.

28. Mellini, *Sir Eldon Gorst*, 46.

29. Gorst, autobiographical notes, 1:119.

maintained by the colonial government and the colonial state.

Gorst's liberal experiment was hardly radical. He resisted all calls for the creation of a constitutional government for Egypt and, much like Cromer, had absolutely no use for the nationalists. Muzzling the nationalists was partially achieved by reviving the 1881 draconian press law that allowed the colonial government broad censorship privileges. What one does see, however, was that Gorst acknowledged the importance of interacting with Egyptian political society. That he chose to do so through the Egyptian ruler and not the nationalists is hardly surprising given the nationalist hostility to the British occupation. That this contradicts the more liberal concepts of popular sovereignty prevalent in Britain was of little importance, especially if one were to acknowledge the veracity of Schumpeter's observations noting the survival of the European despotic feudal impulse within the colonies. As long as the colonial government could succeed in othering the Egyptians and positively managing its relationship with the home society, then the consul general could enjoy tremendous freedom of action. The following informative quotation from Gorst's diaries on the occasion of his appointment as consul general to Egypt is a quite convincing elucidation of the absolutist tendencies exhibited by the colonial officials of various stripes.

Throughout the British Empire there is no place of which the occupant enjoys greater freedom of action than that of the British Agent and Consul General [C.G.] in Egypt. The C.G. is the de facto ruler of the country without being hampered by a parliament or by a network of [cronies] like the Viceroy of India, and interference of the home government has hitherto been limited to such matters as are likely to arouse interest or criticism in the British House of Commons otherwise H.M. [His Majesty's] representative can run the government of the country on whatever lines he thinks right.<sup>30</sup>

Nowhere in the rest of this quotation does one see any acknowledgment of the Egyptians other than in a later reference to them as "the 11 million human beings" for whose welfare he was now responsible. You cannot find a clearer expression of the belief in "white man's burden," which this essay clearly posits is an atavistic reincarnation of the concept of noblesse oblige. The only interference with the consul general's ability to administer as he chose was not from any Egyptian sovereign—body or individual—but from the British House of Commons. Here one sees clearly some of the answers to the overarching question posed at the outset of this article.

How then does the colonial state manufacture consent for its rule in the absence of popular support? Two factors appear to have been at play here. First, it seems apparent that at least in the Egyptian case the colonial state manufactured collaboration by interacting with and surreptitiously directing the actions of the existing sovereign. Egypt, as noted earlier, was ruled by a system of dual governance, in which a British-controlled native government was maintained and run parallel to the colonial government. The process of creating collaborators of native elites has been thoroughly studied by historians and theorists of imperial governance.<sup>31</sup> The success of this policy varied from one consul general to the next, and the degree to which each allowed the khedive and his ministers at least the appearance of dignity and independence determined this success. In Gorst's assessment, Cromer, at least in his later years, had failed miserably at this policy to the detriment of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial government: "The anti-Egyptian attitude into which Lord C. [Cromer] had gradually drifted during the last few years, rendered more acute by the personal hostility that existed between himself and the Khedive, had greatly contributed to strengthen the influence of the extreme nationalist party."<sup>32</sup> Gorst, on becoming consul general, remained faithful to the beliefs he had

30. *Ibid.*, 1:169–70.

31. For a discussion of this phenomena, see Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, ed. Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (London: Longman, 1972), 117–42.

32. Gorst, autobiographical notes, 1:112.

expressed as early as 1893 and sought to reverse this trend. Among the “general lines of policy” by which Gorst “endeavoured” to guide his actions was a determination to “cultivate good relations with the Khedive so that his influence and prestige—whatever they might be worth—may be an asset on our side of the account.”<sup>33</sup>

Surreptitious control succinctly encapsulates Gorst’s governing policy. Reacting to criticisms of his policy of conciliation, Gorst provides in his memoirs one of the most strikingly clear expositions of how a successful imperial administrator carried out his task: “The one administrative quality which the man on the street is capable of admiring is the adoption of what he considers ‘strong measures’ and he is too stupid to understand that patience and conciliation are not incompatible with firmness and decision. Moreover the system of pulling strings in the background and letting others do the shooting, provided I had my own way, was so thoroughly and successfully carried out that it deceived even those that should have known better.”<sup>34</sup>

Gorst’s ability to “pull strings” and “let others do the shooting” was quite successful. His success at diffusing nationalist aspirations and at fostering divisions among Egyptian elites did not go unremarked in Egypt. Zaghlul, who in 1907 was appointed minister of education and who would later be known as the father of Egypt, noted upon the Gorst-inspired appointment of the Christian Copt Ghali as prime minister (*rais al-nudhar*): “Boutrus is qualified, and I like him, but I fear this will not sit well with Muslims, and this is an underhanded policy on the government’s (Gorst’s) part that has no honest intent.”<sup>35</sup> Zaghlul came to believe that it was Gorst’s intent to alienate the khedive from his people by this appointment, for “the newspapers loyal to the occupation hint that the appointment of Boutrus was the Khedive’s decision, and make [themselves] blameless in it.” He believed, quite intelligently, that this appointment was intended to weaken the khedive to such a great extent that he would have to place all his reliance on the British if he wished to maintain

his throne.<sup>36</sup> Although a harsh critic of the khedive, Zaghlul greatly feared the concentration of even more power in the hands of the British.

Another striking aspect to Gorst’s management of affairs was his ability to generally use policy changes to control or at the very least divert attention and criticism both in Egypt and at home in Great Britain. His biographer Peter Mellini very aptly uses the term “diversionary political tactics” to describe some of Gorst’s political maneuvering. A good example of this management skill came in a proposal he footed to expand the role of the Egyptian provincial councils. On face value this reform was intended to increase Egyptian participation in governance in preparation for eventual self-governance. Yet as ever, Gorst’s proposal had another more mundane and politically self-serving purpose, which the following comments to his superiors at the foreign office make clear: “Even if the measure meets the fate which often attends any moderate and reasonable schemes of pleasing nobody, it will have served the useful purpose of directing the journalistic energies of the opposition into a comparatively harmless channel.”<sup>37</sup> The opposition he was referring to was not solely the nationalist opposition in Egypt but the so-labeled radical members of parliament in London with whom the imperialist faction had to contend.

There exists yet another factor I believe is equally if not more crucially important for the manufacture of the political and popular consent that aided British foreign colonial rule. The importance of maintaining some myth of local authority was not solely for the cultivation of collaboration, but it also served as a foil for the imperial administrators. In their interactions with popular society—as distinct from the elites whom I have been describing as political society—the imperial administrators could at little expense to themselves intercede as benevolent moderators of the despotic native state. This benevolent intercession held true in India as it did in Egypt, and after the collapse of this relationship, periods of discontent and

33. *Ibid.*, 1:118–20.

34. *Ibid.*, 1:125.

35. Muhammad ‘Abd al-‘Azim Ramadan, ed., *The Diaries of Saad Zaghlul*, 9 vols. (Cairo: The Egyptian Public Institution for the Book, 1988), 2:739.

36. *Ibid.*, 2:760.

37. Eldon Gorst to Edward Grey, 10 June 1907, Viscount Edward Grey of Falldon Papers, Public Record Office (London), Foreign Office [F. O.] 800, 46:414–15; quoted in Mellini, *Sir Eldon Gorst*, 147.

rebellion against the foreign presence followed. This discontent happened in India before the outbreak of the Sepoy Mutiny in the province of Oudh and the rebellion of 1857 as well as in Egypt after the Denshawai incident in 1906 and again after World War I. In Oudh, for example, its annexation by the British East India Company changed the position of the British official. “Before the annexation . . . the sepoy as landholder had been protected by the British Resident whenever he preferred complaints against the Nawabi government and its officials.”<sup>38</sup> This was no longer the case after annexation, as the former “protector” now became the “extractor and enforcer” and hence the focus of resentment rather than hope. The same pattern would occur in Egypt, where the Denshawai incident did much to destroy the image of British benevolence among the peasants, who form the majority of popular society. At the beginning of his tenure Cromer had abolished the use of floggings as a form of punishment, gaining him great esteem in the eyes of many peasants who were often induced to work on public projects and frequently subjected to the taste of the whip. However, after the events at Denshawai, several individuals were executed and many of the peasants involved, no matter how peripherally, were publicly and severely flogged. Here one sees the same pattern repeated as the British reputation for benevolent intervention on behalf of the people is reversed. This incident, like no other, stimulated Egyptian nationalist feelings and energized the previously moribund nationalist movement. Remarking on this incident, Gorst noted that “the Danshawai (*sic.* Denshawai) affair [was] our most mismanaged piece of work since the beginning of the occupation. Our ill-timed severity gave a tremendous fillip to the nationalist party and alienated the middle-class Egyptian Muslim.”<sup>39</sup> To his credit as an imperial administrator, Gorst did limit the damage of the Denshawai incident and was aided by the fortuitous death of Egypt’s leading nationalist in containing the influence of the Nationalist Party. This containment, however, could only be temporary, and under much less

skillful successors the manufactured collaboration or consent would begin to unravel. World War I and the economic upheavals it created, along with increased expectations of reward, fractured what remained of the manufactured collaboration and consent.

This consideration of the attendant issue of the colonial state and its multiple relationships leads this discussion to the location of one of the many bifurcations that define the colonial state.<sup>40</sup> It seems quite clear from Gorst’s comments in his autobiography that, in large part, it was the opinion of British society and the British House of Commons that helped determine the consul general’s behavior. Egyptian society, both the political and the popular society, could not be ignored but was to be managed and controlled, not necessarily consulted. To a great extent, controlling the popular Egyptian society or polity, if you will, was at least in Gorst’s mind a by-product of managing Egyptian political society, which was defined strictly in terms of the monarch and his pashas. Even when a policy of “benevolent intervention” was employed to gain popular consent, at its heart it required the skillful manipulation of the native political society so that it might play its necessary role. In summation, the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state ruled over a society with which it had no “social contract” and whose opinions and approval were crucial but, it might be fair to say, of secondary importance to the opinion of the society in the home country. Hence the bifurcation indicated at the outset of this paragraph defines the colonial state. Ignoring this delicate balance would eventually lead to disastrous long-term consequences for Anglo-Egyptian relations.

### Conclusion

In principle, the challenges of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state bear some similarity to those facing any state, but they cannot be truly understood without giving proper consideration to its unique character. The lack of popular consent, magnified in the case of Egypt by the extreme foreignness of the British occupier,

38. Irfan Habib, “The Coming of 1857,” *Social Scientist* 26 (1998): 7.

39. Gorst, autobiographical notes, 1:113.

40. For a discussion of the bifurcated nature of colonial rule in Africa as it pertains to rural and urban control mechanisms and the long-term consequences of those different mechanisms, the reader may wish to

consult Mahmood Mandani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

combined with the near impossibility of balancing democratic principles at home and atavistic autocratic principles in the colonies, presented the colonial state with an entirely unique set of problems. By studying Gorst's manipulation and management of the colonial state, one can gain a clear understanding of how some of these challenges faced by the colonial government with the advent of modernity could be overcome. One can actually see how a successful colonial governor, or in Egypt's case consul general, used all the means at his disposal, social, economic, political, and military, to manufacture, if not consent to, general compliance with the colonial state. To amplify the difficulties, it all had to be done while simultaneously considering the response of both the Egyptian and the British societies and maintaining the necessary multiple state-society interactions. Truly understanding how it was all accomplished gives one an elevated understanding of yet another aspect of the colonizer and colonized, occupier and occupied, relationship. §