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BARREN LAND AND FECUND BODIES: THE  
EMERGENCE OF POPULATION DISCOURSE IN  
INTERWAR EGYPT

*The rapid growth in numbers.*

In 100 years from now Egyptians would number 49,600,000.

In 300 years from now they would total 500,000,000.

In 425 years Egyptians would equal the present population of the earth at 2,000,000,000.

In 968 years Egyptians would occupy not only the whole earth but several other planets as well at 973,300,000,000.

—Wendell Cleland<sup>1</sup>

Between 1936 and 1939, the Egyptian Medical Association held a series of forums on birth control and the population problem; the first full-length book on Egypt's population problem was published; the first life tables for Egypt were calculated; a group of university professors organized under the rubric of the Happy Family Society to discuss the need for planned families; the first fatwa on birth control in the 20th century was issued by the mufti of Egypt, Shaykh Abd al-Majid Salim; and the Ministry of Social Affairs was created, part of its mandate being to study the population problem.<sup>2</sup>

The constitution of population both as an object of knowledge requiring observation and management through “numbers, statistics, material phenomena” and as a social problem to be modified for the progress of the human race, I argue, took shape in Egypt in the interwar period.<sup>3</sup> However, the parameters within which the problem of population were discussed during this time period were far broader than that of contemporary discussions, entailing fields of knowledge as varied as medicine, geography, and sociology, in part due to the embryonic nature of specialized fields of expertise such as demography, vital statistics, and eugenics. It is this convergence of overlapping fields of knowledge—which took the calculus of life and death, of the fecundity of lands and bodies, into consideration and which concerned itself with the scientific reform of society—that marks population politics at this time.<sup>4</sup>

The interwar period is, indeed, unique in the history of population politics in Egypt. In brief, the Muhammad ‘Ali period up to the British invasion was characterized by an expansionist conception of population and embedded within the imperial framework of

the Ottoman Empire. More specifically, population concerns were driven by a conception of population as related to strength in numbers (to provide for military and fiscal exigencies) and to the expansion of imperial wealth.<sup>5</sup> Further, some have argued, the colonial period after 1882 is the period in which the governmentalization of population—or the harnessing of population, the management of its growth and characteristics, to colonial concerns of state—occurs.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, however, I emphasize the precise moment at which population concerns became harnessed to Egyptian *national* and *nationalist* concerns. This shift corresponds to what Timothy Mitchell has argued represents “the collapse of the colonial organization of power, knowledge and exchange, and the rise of the national state as producer of statistical knowledge and custodian of the economic.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, I seek to uncover the new modes of governance, expertise, and social knowledge that defined a distinctive era of population politics in interwar Egypt.

#### OVERVIEW

Throughout the interwar period, population was viewed primarily in terms of the problem of the quantity (*ʿadad*) versus the quality (*nawʿ*) of the nation’s inhabitants<sup>8</sup> and configured as a component of social welfare. Population debates thus revolved around two points, both related to population as a problem of social intervention and engineering. The first problem was the debate over the neo-Malthusian reduction of the birthrate. This concern generated a flurry of empirical, statistical studies of historical demography and debates as to whether Egypt was in fact overpopulated. The second problem was the improvement of the characteristics of the population either through the encouragement and enhancement of “types” or the elimination of “defectives” through social welfare and eugenics. “Quality” encompassed the social uplift of the mother-child unit (often through maternal welfare programs) and the peasantry (through rural reconstruction projects) and thus dovetailed with the concerns of rural reformers. What is unique about this time period, however, is the confluence of these two issues. Writers dealt with population as a “total social fact”—that is, arguments regarding historical demography could not be separated from issues of social welfare.<sup>9</sup> The quantity of the population could not be divorced from its quality.

Before the middle of the 1930s, population concerns were varied, with colonial figures such as James Ireland Craig expressing concern about overpopulation or population maldistribution as early as 1917, and members of the indigenous intelligentsia such as Mustafa Amer noting vast increases in population. But by and large, neither sustained debate nor consensus existed on the state of Egypt’s population. Thus, for example, in the late 1920s debates on family law held that Egypt suffered from *underpopulation*, thereby providing a legitimization for polygamy.<sup>10</sup>

After the mid-1930s, a veritable onslaught of publications, conferences, and debates on population took place in the mainstream press (in newspapers and journals such as *al-Ahram*, *al-Hilal*, and *al-Muqtataf*), in specialized professional meetings and journals (the Egyptian Medical Association), in the women’s press (*al-Nahda al-nisaʿiyya* and *al-Marʾa al-misriyya*), and within the religious establishment (*dar al-ʿifāʿ*). Major establishment figures, including members of Parliament and landowners—for example, the reformist Mirrit Ghali and the somewhat feudal Hafiz Afifi Pasha, in keeping with their

landowning class interests—argued that the causes of Egypt's poverty were overpopulation and poor public health and housing, rather than the unequal distribution of landed property.

In fact, it can be argued that the much clichéd discussions of the vicious circle of “poverty, disease, and ignorance” centered on the problem of population, which was to be resolved through the regulation of women and the peasantry. By “the regulation of women,” I mean the dual process of fixing women in healthy, modernized, and regulated reproduction and child rearing, and of relegating to men the management of birth control, either in their domestic capacity as heads of household or in their political capacity as social reformers.<sup>11</sup> The regulation of women is further apparent in the multitude of maternal–child welfare programs that emerged in both rural and urban areas of Egypt in the 20th century. By “the regulation of the peasantry,” I mean the process of reforming rural and peasant life to lead the peasantry to “reformed” modes of life and social practices appropriate to the progress and civility of the modern world. These included such attempts as rural reconstruction projects and model village programs.

Inserted into the larger social and political context of Egypt's newly found independence from the British, and the dislocations that had taken place in the aftermath of World War I—the nascent industrialization of the interwar period; the emergence of a large urban working class and an organized labor movement; the heightened importance of the land question; the increased scale of agricultural unemployment; and the increase in crime, prostitution, narcotic use, and other social maladies—the question of social reform reached a heightened pitch by the middle of the 1930s. To resolve what came to be called the social question (*al-mas'ala al-ijtima'iyya*), middle-class reformers turned to the management of population and the regulation of women and the peasantry. It is not accidental, then, that the two populations most systematically targeted for improvement were those responsible for the reproduction of labor power and the extraction of wealth from the land.

In many respects, the focus on population represented a naturalized explanation of Egypt's agricultural crisis and the problem of rural poverty. Indeed, it was the acute nature of the social and economic state of Egypt's agricultural laborers in the post–Depression period and the impending crisis of the social reproduction of labor power that rendered the problem of population salient in the first place. Yet it would not be until the middle of the 1940s that the relationship among population, poverty, and land reform would be articulated coherently. The agrarian question did not emerge full-blown until the final years of World War II, at which point the economic state of the rural proletariat had deteriorated so much that the question of land reform and a more frontal assault on social reform was all but necessary to avoid the dangers of revolutionary ferment. This was further underscored by the increased politicization of the countryside and urban centers in the late 1930s and 1940s. From the middle of the 1940s and beyond, the agrarian question entered into and dominated public debate, although no substantive actions were taken to ameliorate the economic situation of the peasantry until the advent of the revolutionary regime.

Although it problematized population growth to a far greater extent than in the previous period, population politics under Nasser continued to be framed within the larger issue of national and familial welfare. Nasserist political discourse characterized population programs as part of social welfare—the primary object of state concern. The

government-sponsored programs of family planning under Nasser mobilized ideologies of nationalism and national progress, which emphasized family planning as an integral component of the welfare of the state and its people, a culmination of the discourse on welfare of the 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

In this article, however, I focus solely on the interwar period as the years in which the most vigorous and sustained debates on population took place, and in which antinatalist and pronatalist views were promulgated. Thus, I analyze 1930s and 1940s debates on population to draw out the relationship between population debates and state-building projects. The problem of population was viewed by its theorists as principally a problem of land and labor, to be resolved through the improvement of the dispositions of one or the other—for example, through the increase of cultivatable land or the improvement of the quality of the population. In its totality, however, the problem of population was seen as a component of social welfare. It moved in tandem with the identification of women and the peasantry as objects of moral and material improvement and wide-scale attempts at their social uplift through various efforts, such as rural and village reconstruction projects, maternal-child welfare centers, and the various activities of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

A key backdrop for the emergence of population debates in 1930s Egypt was the various international developments in demography, eugenics, and population studies. The convergence of international interest in the question of population in the 1920s and 1930s may be related to several factors: the disintegration of empire; the negative association of eugenics with fascism; European fears of depopulation; and the development and refinement of new forms of geopolitical representation, such as the use of aggregate and comparative statistical measures and the development of historical demography.<sup>13</sup> The interwar period saw the proliferation of international birth-control movements and conferences, in which birthrates, rather than racial hygiene or eugenic merit, were the main focus of attention. For example, the 1927 World Population Conference held in Geneva under the organization of Margaret Sanger may mark the beginning of the construction of population first as an international problem, and second as an object of scientific prediction and management. In the words of one participant, “[P]roduction can only be rationalized if one undertakes to rationalize reproduction just as intensively and intelligently.”<sup>14</sup> Widely read by the Egyptian intelligentsia, the conference proceedings were critical in the formation of Egyptian debates on population—in particular, regarding the question of the demographic optimum for population.

In contrast to the European colonial concern over depopulation and military expansionism, population debates in the postcolonial national context were deeply enmeshed in the bourgeois project of nation-building. Throughout the interwar period, Egyptian elites mobilized nationalist arguments in debates on population. In 1936, as the Egyptian elite was aspiring to independence from the British, social planners were eager to assert their own control over the realm of population—a new object of “governance” in the post-independence period. Population was to be rationalized as an object of knowledge and managed in the interest of the people. These concerns were especially salient given the imperialist ambitions of fascist nations such as Italy and Germany, which made it apparent that population was a critical component of modern warfare and politics. With Italy on the borders of Cyrenaica and Ethiopia, such concerns were part of the recognition of the importance of numbers—or demographic weight—in the modern era.

## "NUMBERS, STATISTICS, MATERIAL PHENOMENA"

Unquestionably, the development of population as an object of study owes its genesis to that quintessential sign of modernity: the modern census. The first countrywide enumeration of the Egyptian population was made at the behest of Muhammad 'Ali; it is known as the census of 1848. The census was driven largely by fiscal and military concerns (taxation and conscription), as well as the knowledge that "the causes of the progress and civilization of other nations is the precise enumeration of their people and the orderly administration of their interests."<sup>15</sup> As Kenneth Cuno and Michael Reimer have argued, the 1848 Egyptian census was very much a part of the overall Ottoman effort "to enumerate the empire's population rather than a separate undertaking."<sup>16</sup> It is precisely this "Ottomanness" of the census that distinguishes it from later censuses, which were embedded within colonial or nationalist contexts.

The subsequent census of Egypt took place in 1882, just months before the battle of Tall al-Kabir. In that year, the population was enumerated on a single day—by Western definitions, a modern census count. It was the 1897 census, however, that was viewed by British colonial officials and modernizing Egyptian technocrats as Egypt's first reliable attempt at the statistical enumeration of the population. Successive censuses were taken decennially (1907, 1917, 1927, and so on). Even though an entire apparatus for census taking would be in place by 1917, including a general statistical office, modern counting and tabulating Hollinger machines, active census propaganda (*nashr al-da'wa*), and house numbering, census taking in Egypt was, in the words of James Ireland Craig,

characterized by a complete absence of continuity in its preparation and method. Owing to the absence until 1905 of a general statistical office, or a proper registrar, familiar with the problems of population, a census office had on each occasion been constituted *de novo*. On the termination of the work the office was wound up, the staff dispersed and the documents mostly destroyed, so that those in charge of the next census were altogether deprived of the benefit of the verbal or written tradition of previous experience.<sup>17</sup>

Craig was a pinnacle figure in the development of the Egyptian census and the use of statistical data in Egypt. He served, among other posts, as controller-general of the census.<sup>18</sup> As Craig was wont to point out, the timing of censuses in Egypt proved to be a frequent and awkward problem.

The 1882 census, for example, was taken at the most inopportune moment. The 'Urabi military revolt had taken place the year before; the British and French governments had presented the joint note to the khedive; in July, Alexandria was bombed; and in September, the battle of Tall al-Kabir took place.<sup>19</sup> According to the director-general of the 1907 census, "[T]here has probably not been a single year in the last thirty years when conditions more unfavourable for census taking prevailed than in 1882."<sup>20</sup> The 1897 census was taken during a saint's festival (*mawlid*) in the town of Zaqaziq, which led to a surge in the population of that province and a decrease in the census count of that same province the following census. (The Egyptian census was based on the *de facto* population, or all those present in a district at a given moment, rather than the *de jure* population.) The 1917 census was taken during World War I, when the British demand for labor had caused a temporary emigration of Egyptian laborers, in addition to the fact "that not a few people had objected to the taking of the census."<sup>21</sup> Finally, because of the

Muslim use of the lunar calendar and the imperative of avoiding census taking during the month of Ramadan, the date of enumeration shifted from census to census. This is not to mention the “vagueness and ambiguity” of terms used in the census schedules, a problem generally endemic to the operation of a census.<sup>22</sup>

Timothy Mitchell, drawing on Georg Simmel, has discussed the process of creating a world of “unrelenting calculability,” illustrating how the relationship between calculability—whether in the cadastral survey or the modern census—and concomitant new forms of social expertise led to the creation of an effect of distance between the expert and the object calculated. This separation created its own forms of instability and crisis that ultimately “destabilized the process of making a world of calculation,” as the difficulties in measuring the population discussed earlier demonstrate.<sup>23</sup> Yet despite this seemingly slipshod and chaotic collection of census data, the modern census, and its principles of collection, classification, and enumeration, has remained one of the principal modalities for the regulation and transformation of national subjects and citizens in the modern era. As Talal Asad states,

The point is that the practice of assembling and classifying figures periodically on births, diseases, crimes, occupations, natural resources and so on was, from a governmental standpoint, not merely a mode of understanding and representing populations, but an instrument for regulating and transforming them. This applies also, and even more strongly, to the “modernizing” nation-states that have succeeded European colonies.<sup>24</sup>

Craig understood this principle well and was keen to point to the modern census as the most effective monitor of changes in national population and resources. The value of statistics as a science that treats the “collection and arrangement of facts and figures bearing on the condition—material, social and moral—of a people,” according to Craig, lay in its practical use.<sup>25</sup>

In his discussion of the 1917 census of Egypt, Craig noted that one of the main roles of the census lay in determining whether “the agricultural resources are keeping pace with the needs of the population.”<sup>26</sup> By 1926, in underscoring the census’s primary political and economic importance, he devoted considerable attention to population as one of the most important issues “moulding human action at the present moment.”<sup>27</sup> For Craig, the census could serve as an important gauge of population—of the relationship between population and cultivatable land and questions concerning the quality of the population (age distribution, average mortality, size of families, class and social position, education level, polygamy, etc.).<sup>28</sup> By 1926, Craig was claiming that Egypt was already feeling “the pressure of population on the means of subsistence.”<sup>29</sup>

Craig’s concern with the modern census marks a transition from a view of Egypt’s population as an agglomeration of disparate peoples, or “as no more than a polyglot mix of different religious, racial and ethnic groups,” to a view of population as an homogeneous entity whose quantitative characteristics could be measured and acted on.<sup>30</sup> Henceforth, the production of statistical data in Egypt would gain momentum, and increased attention would be paid to the numerical relationship between population and resources.<sup>31</sup> As Roger Owen has argued, Craig initiated a statistical regime in which “data was provided which was abstract, quantifiable and transferable.”<sup>32</sup>

Yet the transformation of the notion of population into a discrete and quantifiable entity did not occur immediately. In 1928, Mustafa Amer, a professor of geography at

the Egyptian University, was sent as one of the Egyptian delegates to the International Geographical Congress, which took place at Cambridge. In his paper “Some Problems of the Population of Egypt,” he discussed the issue of population as principally a problem of *specific* populations.<sup>33</sup> The populations in question were the Nubians, Upper Egyptian migrant laborers, and “the foreign elements.” The construction of the Aswan Dam in 1902 and its heightening in 1910 had resulted in flooding as well as the northward movement of the Nubian population in search of work in urban centers:

To control the movements of the Nubians on the one hand, and of the Upper Egyptians [*ṣaʿīdīs*] on the other, and to protect the big urban centres of the North from the unruly elements of both these groups, and especially from those who have no fixed abode and no particular employment, are some of the problems that have to be carefully and speedily dealt with, for the sake of public security. More serious still, and more detrimental to the social and economic structure of Egypt, is the slow but steady trickling in of poor foreign elements from the other side of the Mediterranean.<sup>34</sup>

Less than a decade later, Egypt’s population would be thought of *not* as an agglomeration of disparate populations—Upper Egyptian peasants, bedouins, Nubians, foreigners—but as a homogeneous mass whose quantitative and qualitative characteristics could be observed and analyzed. In effect, this mass could be taken as an object of study—as a total social fact. As such, population became subject to laws and regularities, which needed to be studied to effect the proper transformation of the social and natural world, to align the fecundity of bodies with that of the soil.

#### BARREN LAND AND FECUND BODIES

The first comprehensive treatment of the population problem of Egypt was Wendell Cleland’s 1936 *The Population Problem in Egypt*.<sup>35</sup> Cleland, an American who had lived in Cairo since 1917, was a member of the faculty of the American University in Cairo, where he taught psychology. His involvement with prominent ministry officials working on issues such as irrigation, public health, sanitation, and hygiene impressed on him Egypt’s most serious social issues. Cleland was to become a point of entry for subsequent writings: virtually all studies on Egypt’s population problem take Cleland as a reference point. Although Cleland’s text is emblematic of larger trends in Egyptian social science, its enduring impact on Egyptian population debates should not be underestimated. Henceforth, the neo-Malthusian perspective (in which artificial mechanisms, such as birth control, are proposed to curb population growth so as to regulate the relationship between population and resources) achieved an unparalleled degree of dominance in population studies. As late as the mid-1960s, Cleland’s groundbreaking book was still considered a hallmark of sociological writing on Egypt.<sup>36</sup>

As a member of the Egyptian Association for Social Studies (EASS), Cleland worked on a rural reconstruction project with Egyptians in which he helped design two model villages in the Delta and conducted a study that resulted in an unpublished manuscript titled, “Poverty in Egypt.” The EASS, founded in 1936, was involved in social research, the training of social specialists, and several experimental social studies, such as village reconstruction projects and the reform of juvenile delinquents.<sup>37</sup> The EASS also founded the Cairo School of Social Work (Madrasat al-Khidma al-Ijtimaʿiyya bi-l-Qahira) in October 1937, which aimed at the modern scientific training of specialists to study

social problems and at the uplift of various populations through the provision of social services.<sup>38</sup> Cleland's involvement in larger but related social projects, such as the rural reconstruction projects of the EASS, is emblematic of the connections between the issues of population and social welfare.

Cleland's *The Population Problem in Egypt* was divided into two sections, "one quantitative and the other qualitative." The first section surveyed the numerical trends in Egypt's population; the second section surveyed the standard of living. He noted the importance of a study of the standard of living, since "a study of the known resources of modern Egypt leads one to conclude that they are quite inadequate to support so great a population on any higher standard of living than present, and, furthermore, if the quality of people is of any importance, then somehow a limitation of numbers must be brought about."<sup>39</sup> Cleland's methodology was straightforward. It entailed the simple juxtaposition of estimated general trends in population (based on the birth and death rates) versus the "capacity of the land," calculated by applying "to the whole of the habitable country the density ratio of the most populous section outside of the large cities."<sup>40</sup> Thus, he concluded (in a classically Malthusian formulation) that, based on a comparison between the growth of population and that of cultivatable lands, "the people appear to multiply more rapidly than the acreage."<sup>41</sup>

Cleland argued that the density of population and scarcity of arable land, the exceedingly low standard of living, and the high rate of unemployment among agricultural laborers were all indicative of overpopulation, the solution to which was an interventionist population policy advocating the use of birth control.<sup>42</sup> He wrote,

It is obvious, therefore, that the growth in the agricultural products has not kept pace with the growth in population. As agriculture is the chief occupation . . . and the products of the land the chief source of wealth, it is inevitable under present conditions that this constant running ahead of the density beyond the productivity of the soil must result in a steady decline of the already low standard of living.<sup>43</sup>

It was this Malthusian "constant running ahead" of the fertility of man (and, hence, density of population) over that of the soil that led to the deplorably low standard of living and quality of the population.<sup>44</sup>

Cleland's formulation differed from a strictly Malthusian one in which population, subject to the laws of nature, was checked by misery. For Malthus, misery included starvation, disease, and death and was the principal check on the growth of the poor. Thus, the natural tendency for the laboring classes to increase would be "checked" by their inability to receive the subsistence necessary for their preservation and reproduction.<sup>45</sup> For Cleland, the laboring poor and peasantry reproduced "unchecked," as "half-living listless people"—undernourished and debilitated by enervating diseases such as bilharzia and ancylostomiasis, which "deplete[d] the vitality of the laboring classes," thereby reducing the efficiency of peasant labor.<sup>46</sup> This was a common concern among officials working within the Ministry of Public Health, among them Abdel Wahid al-Wakil. A member of a prominent landowning family with strong Wafdist ties, al-Wakil was a medical doctor, health inspector of Cairo, and fellow member of the EASS. He had been active in formulating sanitary requirements for Egyptian villages in a manner consonant with what was then termed the peasant *mentalité* (*'aqliyya*).<sup>47</sup> Al-Wakil became minister of health in 1942.<sup>48</sup>



The concern about labor efficiency and productivity of the population, particularly the peasantry, was echoed at the 1937 Conference on Birth Control sponsored by the Egyptian Medical Association, which gathered an array of prominent medical practitioners, social scientists, and ministry officials, including four members of the EASS. Several speakers—notably, Muhammad Awad Muhammad, a professor of geography on the Faculty of Arts, one of Egypt's first professional geographers and a member of the EASS, and Mustafa Fahmi, a professor of social science and an official at the Ministry of Education—argued that high birthrates led to lower standards of living and lowered the productive power of the nation.<sup>49</sup> With Egypt's low average life expectancies, "most [citizens] die without benefiting the nation with their productive efforts. The important thing is to improve their health and life, thereby increasing production."<sup>50</sup> Infant and child mortality, which in 1937 was estimated to account for 65 percent of deaths in Egypt, was also considered a serious loss in productivity.<sup>51</sup>

Again and again, participants at the conference emphasized the imperative (in the words of Ann Anagnost) to reproduce less in order to reproduce better.<sup>52</sup> According to the geographer Abbas Mustafa Ammar, "What use is a large population which debases the nation—weak of body, devoid of strength, distressed in mind, ill bred, and of poor moral constitution? . . . We want progeny that benefits society and uplifts it and . . . we hope birth planning becomes a national policy for Egyptians."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Ammar was destined sixteen years later, in his capacity as minister of social affairs and chairman of the National Commission for Population Problems (the first official body established in Egypt to deal with the population problem), to submit the first official memorandum on the "[p]opulation situation in Egypt and the necessity for planning a population policy for the country" in November 1953.<sup>54</sup>

Such arguments had become increasingly common in the second half of the 1930s, foreshadowing the future dominance of a neo-Malthusian perspective in Egyptian social-science and population debates. The year following the publication of Cleland's book, El-Sayed Azmi, a statistician at the Ministry of Finance, delivered a lecture at the American University in Cairo in which he characterized "rapid and continuous population growth" and population "mal-distribution" as among Egypt's most serious problems, going as far as to suggest the need to embark on a population policy.<sup>55</sup> Several notable Egyptian public figures and social reformers, such as Mirrit Boutros Ghali (1908–91) and 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman (1913–98), began to write about the problem of Egypt as a problem of rapid population growth in relation to the dearth of agricultural land.<sup>56</sup>

Mirrit Ghali was a major intellectual figure in interwar Egypt. A member of a prominent and large landowning Coptic family, he founded in 1944, along with several other intellectuals, the National Renaissance Society, which called for the social reform of Egyptian society.<sup>57</sup> Ghali was a member of the Chamber of Deputies in the 1940s and minister of municipal and rural affairs in the Najib Hilali cabinet, which was toppled by the 1952 revolution.<sup>58</sup> Ghali's well known 1938 text *The Policy of Tomorrow* targeted rapid population growth in relation to agricultural growth as Egypt's first and foremost economic and social problem. At this time, Ghali explicitly rejected European socialist notions that low standards of living were caused by the unequal distribution of national wealth. He argued instead that distribution played an insignificant role in the economic and social ills of Egypt. Rather, he argued, the "economic difficulty of Egypt is simple enough; it is the result of overpopulation and of the poverty of economic resources."<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the issue of population was discussed in terms of a material relationship between the number and quality of the nation's inhabitants and its national wealth and resources. This often metonymized in the image of a family, which could not sustain itself because it continued to grow although its income was fixed. As Cleland put it, "[I]f capital and income are insufficient for a large national family, and the national family exists in misery, then the next generation should learn its lesson and limit the size of the family, so as to elevate its standards and remove its miseries. Surely a people can be as proud of the quality of its people as its quantity."<sup>60</sup> Cleland, Ghali, Azmi, and others had posited a fundamental antagonism between the rate of population growth (quantity) and the standards of living of the fellahin (quality) and, therefore, the productive power of Egypt.<sup>61</sup>

"THE ROAD TO A NEW SANITARY LIFE": UPLIFTING WOMEN  
AND PEASANTS

What solutions existed for such a dire national situation in which population was purportedly outstripping resources? Cleland had proposed a plan for reducing births that included (1) raising the standards of living and hygiene, which would result in decreased fertility (that is, a rise in culture would be followed by a decline in the birthrate); (2) promoting birth-control clinics; and (3) eugenic measures to stop the propagation of future dependent classes (that is, legislation "to restrict propagation of the unfit, limit free social services and raise the age of marriage").<sup>62</sup>

Controlling the peasantry's "natural" libidinal tendencies, Cleland argued, required social intervention—in the form of birth control, as well as moral education and psychological training—a position referred to as neo-Malthusian.<sup>63</sup> Although the task would be difficult "in view of the national ambition for size, the ignorance of the people, the strength of custom and the religious fanaticism," he wrote, "[p]eople today are afflicted by the megalomania of ultra nationalism, which seems to demand larger and larger populations."<sup>64</sup> Many Egyptians at the Conference on Birth Control agreed. Muhammad Awad Muhammad compared Egypt to China and India, noting favorably the Indian government's efforts to promote artificial birth control.<sup>65</sup> Kamal al-Din Fahmi, a sanitary engineer and member of the EASS, presented a detailed and triumphalist history of the various birth-control movements in Europe and Japan to illustrate the acceptance that birth control had gained over time and place, despite the resistance it encountered.<sup>66</sup>

Even eugenics received a favorable hearing at the 1937 conference. Referred to as *tahṣīn al-nasl*, or the improvement of offspring, eugenics was discussed in the Egyptian context not as a racial issue, but predominantly as the removal, through sterilization, birth control, or confinement, of mental and physical defectives from the body politic (*jism al-jamā'a*). There were those who advocated birth control not only as a way to reduce population growth but also as a form of negative eugenics. For Kamal Fahmi, a sanitary engineer; Ali Bey Fu'ad, director of the Child Welfare Section of the Ministry of Health; and Mustafa Fahmi, a sociologist at the Ministry of Education, both birth control and sterilization were negative forms of eugenics and, although less preferred to positive eugenics, were nevertheless deemed necessary.<sup>67</sup> Thus, they recommended not only that doctors encourage the sick or infirm to use birth control, but that sterilization or confinement be performed when necessary for those with sexual diseases and for

the insane and feeble-minded.<sup>68</sup> Repeatedly they emphasized the importance of quality not quantity. "It is to the nation's benefit to have children of healthy build and sound mind rather than a plentiful but disabled and weak minded progeny. . . . Better to live as a progressive nation of small numbers than a populated backward nation."<sup>69</sup>

It was, however, attempts to improve the standard of living that proved the most successfully advocated population policy in the 1930s and 1940s. The concept of standard of living was understood to mean all those components related to the health and hygienic standards, which contributed to the well-being and strength of the population and hence optimized its ability to produce and provide for the needs of the nation. Regardless of their position on birth control, those who wrote on the population problem in the 1930s and 1940s were able to agree on one issue: the state's obligation to provide social services for women and the peasantry to improve the health and hygiene (or standards of living) of the population. This included various state-sponsored efforts for the social uplift of women (through maternal-child welfare programs) and the peasantry.

In fact, the regulation of women was most directly demonstrated in the realm of maternal-child welfare programs. Throughout the interwar period, Egyptian mothers were portrayed as ignorant of the principles of cleanliness and hygiene, which children's dispensaries and maternal-child health clinics sought to address through the instruction of mothers "in the methods of cleanliness and the proper feeding and bringing up of their children."<sup>70</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1920s, philanthropic organizations and government clinics aimed at informing maternal practices and improving child welfare to reduce infant mortality. An interest in the scientific organization of the protection of childhood began to develop, and Egyptian delegates were sent to attend international conferences.<sup>71</sup> Public governmental organizations, as well as private philanthropic initiatives such as the Society for the Protection of Children, Mabarrat Muhammad Ali, the Red Crescent Society, and the Society of Mothers of the Future, were responsible for the diffusion of health propaganda to mothers and children all over Egypt.<sup>72</sup> Midwives and health visitors conducted home visits in which they instructed mothers on feeding, clothing, and bathing their children.

In 1927 a special unit called the Child Welfare Section was created by the Public Health Administration. It was responsible for operating permanent and traveling child welfare centers, children's dispensaries, and schools for midwives.<sup>73</sup> The section was created to attend to the treatment of hereditary diseases, to the education of mothers in child care and disease prevention, and to child welfare.<sup>74</sup> By 1936, Cleland could claim child-welfare work as an arena that had made great gains in Egypt:

There is a commendable industry among the officials of these centers in attacking the mountain of ignorance and superstition under which the vast majority of Egyptian mothers are buried. Instruction is given by lectures, moving pictures, demonstrations and printed matter at the centers and in the homes and schools, government physicians, midwives, and health visitors all participating. Much excellent work is being done in the child welfare centers in removing the superstitious confidence of mothers.<sup>75</sup>

The regulation of the mother-child unit thus formed one locus of the interwar concern with the welfare and productivity of the population. The other locus was prominently occupied by the fellah. Rural reconstruction projects under both private and

governmental patronage took place throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these projects were prototypes for the more systematized rural reconstruction work undertaken by the Ministry of Social Affairs in the 1940s and 1950s, such as the Fellah Department's large-scale projects known as the Rural Social Centers.

According to Azmi, Ghali, Cleland, and others, the most fundamental component in any government population policy would be to raise the standard of living of the fellahin. In keeping with the work of the EASS, Cleland's ultimate vision was one of structured, hygienic communities of peasants living in a manner appropriate to the progress and civility of the modern world. "In the following plan I see an average family of from three to five children with intelligent, literate parents, living healthy lives in solid, clean houses, very simply furnished, which will belong to well ordered, sanitary communities."<sup>76</sup> The image of an average family living in "solid, clean houses . . . which belong to well-ordered, sanitary communities" was a powerful one that many of Cleland's ministerial colleagues had been attempting to implement throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

In fact, Cleland was personally involved in implementing such ideas in governmental programs and policies in Egypt. The EASS conducted several experimental village projects in the Delta between 1939 and 1941. The projects were designed "to discover through careful observation, study and experimentation, the best possible technique for raising the standard of living in the Egyptian village."<sup>77</sup> Two villages were initially chosen for the experiments: al-Manayel and Shatanuf, both in the Delta region. Reconstruction work was begun in both villages in October 1939.<sup>78</sup> Cleland formulated the original plan for the research study on the villages. As a first step, detailed studies of all aspects (social, economic, educational, hygienic) of village life were compiled; social surveys were conducted of all families in the village; and complete medical examinations were made of all villagers.<sup>79</sup> A social center supervised by a social worker, a maternal-child welfare center supervised by visiting nurses and assisted by local midwives, and a health unit for endemic diseases (founded by the Ministry of Public Health) were established in the villages.<sup>80</sup> Services even included reconciliation committees to arbitrate village disputes and religious reform committees to organize sermons and supervise religious festivities.<sup>81</sup>

In al-Manayel, a meeting hall and model rural school were also established, as were a series of novel interventions: workshops for youths, cooperative societies, a women's campaign, and a village cleanliness campaign. Lectures, meetings, radio broadcasts, and other forms of propaganda were disseminated primarily through the meeting hall, with one day a week devoted specifically to women. On occasion, a "health propaganda car" visited the village, dispensing health information to villagers through a loudspeaker.<sup>82</sup> The health visitors were responsible for a range of activities, including immunization, follow-up medical care, home visits, hygiene instruction, and cleanliness inspections. They were supposed to become part of the villages.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of these reform projects was the presence of trained medical and social specialists. The peasant mentality of passivity and lassitude, reformers argued, required the dynamism of trained individuals. Social workers were viewed as indispensable components of successful social reform, and the recruitment of patriotic youths for village amelioration was suggested by many.<sup>84</sup> The constant presence of health inspectors and visitors, social workers and monitors, and other trained personnel ensured the level of guidance and supervision thought necessary for educating peasants

and inculcating them with the spirit of reform so that they would come to desire it for themselves.

Often it was private initiatives for rural reform, such as those of the EASS and of the Royal Agricultural Society, that paved the way for state initiatives.<sup>85</sup> In fact, it was only in 1937 that a department for village amelioration was added to the Ministry of Public Health. At that time, the Ministry of Public Health was developing an organized strategy for rural reform that included improving the availability of clean drinking water, the provision of sewage systems in the villages, and the organization of the villages and improvement of the housing of the fellah.<sup>86</sup>

It must be emphasized that projects such as those of the child-welfare centers and the EASS were an essential component of interwar population discourse in Egypt. Thus, often enough the concerns of population theorists, which encompassed the social uplift of women (through maternal welfare programs) and the peasantry (through rural reconstruction projects), dovetailed with the concerns of rural reformers.

#### “L'ÉLOQUENCE DES CHIFFRES”

Writing in 1942, Elie Nassif, a professor at the Royal Faculty of Law in Cairo, composed a book-length response that directly criticized Cleland's proposition that Egypt was suffering from a population problem whose solution was to embark on a birth-control program.<sup>87</sup> Nassif was one of many writers in Egypt at this time who criticized the call for birth control. Both historical and sociological in his approach, Nassif persistently claimed that population doctrines, as well as population itself, had to be historicized. Nassif's view of population corresponded most closely to that of the Italian statistician Corrado Gini. For Gini, Malthusian theories of the geometric increase of population were premised on one fundamentally flawed assumption—namely, that “the reproductive powers of populations remain constant throughout their generations.”<sup>88</sup> Gini had formulated the theory of the cyclical rise and fall of population, whose underlying postulate was the differential rates of increase of different populations, according to race and class, on the basis of evolutionary biological difference. According to Gini, populations—like societies, individuals, and other organisms—had biological life cycles of birth, evolution, and death. The implications were decidedly anti-neo-Malthusian, since intervals at diverse points in history could represent transitory phases of over- or underpopulation.

Nassif's work was meant to be a theoretical intervention into the existing literature on population and demography. This was unique among Egyptian writings on population at the time. Within his extensive theoretical overview of the criteria of demography, the core of Nassif's critique rests on the impoverished, reductive, abstract, and ahistorical nature of the Anglo-Saxon idea of the demographic optimum. The backdrop of many Anglo-American demographic arguments on the problem of population in the 1920s and 1930s turned on the elusive concept of an optimum. Although the concept of an optimum population for a nation seems straightforward, it was to generate much debate among demographers, statisticians, and other scholars of population. In brief, the demographic optimum referred to the ideal numerical relationship between the natural resources and the size of the population of a geographically bounded polity, usually calculated as the population at which the maximization of real income per head could be attained.

Nassif argued that in defining the demographic optimum as the population corresponding to the highest real individual income, those “Anglo-Saxon doctrinaires” excluded the possibility of diverse demographic optimums corresponding to the progressive evolution of the social and economic structure of a society and its complexity.<sup>89</sup> Following Gini, he maintained that in certain instances an elevated population density corresponded to economic (or other) advantages. National psychology was key. Whereas some races did not require demographic pressure to stimulate a spirit of initiative (for example, Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians), others needed it as a stimulant to progress (Italy and, one could add, Egypt). For yet others, demographic pressure might have no effect (India and China).<sup>90</sup>

Nassif thus tried to develop a methodology that would account for the historical and cultural determinants of population—that is, its specificity to Egypt. This, he contended, required a concept of social evolution in which one could allow for the natural evolution of societal structures to account for Egypt’s imputed overpopulation as a necessary stimulant to its social, political, and economic development. Further, he argued that political and moral considerations were key to discussions of population—in particular, the difference between the rate of growth of the higher and lower classes had given birth to an ascending demographic movement in which the fertility and vitality of the lower classes was continuously outstripping that of the upper classes. The ramifications of neo-Malthusian practices in the Occident were only just beginning to be felt:

Need I mention the effects of this [birth-control] policy on Western countries? Birth control had the effect . . . of reducing the births amongst the intellectual class who should have been encouraged to multiply; so the best of social classes was the first sacrifice of this policy. . . . [S]ociologists and economists in the West are now concerned with . . . the continuous decline in overall birth rates. . . . Is it not necessary, then, to review Professor Cleland’s arguments before following through with his suggestions? . . . We need to measure changes in population and standard of living before we assume any relationship between the two.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, a crucial component of nationalist thought in the 1930s was the concern for the formation of a *classe dirigente* that would lead Egypt toward an indigenous modernizing nation-state. The solidification of such a nationalist elite required the maintenance of an appropriate balance among the social orders. Social reformers remained concerned that any attempt to inaugurate neo-Malthusian practices would lead to the cannibalization of the productive and innovative middle classes by the lower orders. Issues of class remained at the heart of population debates. Criticizing both the eugenics and birth-control movements as having led to a declining birthrate, Nassif suggested that efforts turn instead to the development of a national economy and industry to reestablish an equilibrium between human agents and natural factors of production. Indeed, the “existence of an economic elite could remedy demographic pressure while its absence could aggravate it.”<sup>92</sup>

Many opponents of birth control at the 1937 Conference on Birth Control agreed. Thus, Muhammad Hassan and Hasan al-Banna, leader of the Muslim Brothers, argued that it would be the middle, educated classes that would heed the call to birth control, with harmful national consequences.<sup>93</sup>

[T]he class which uses birth control is the middle class—the enlightened and intelligent class of the nation—the class which produces ulama, inventors and innovators in every art and science,

the class from which extraordinary men are produced in all nations (such as, in the case of Egypt, Sa'd Zaghul, Mustafa al-Nahas, Tal'at Harb, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh, etc.). . . . It is not proper that this class, which transmits its unique characteristics of intelligence and talent to its offspring through heredity, should consider limiting its progeny.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, Abd al-Majid Nafi'a, a lawyer and member of the Chamber of Deputies who was noted for his fervent economic nationalism, argued that the call for birth control was a "national crime and not a social necessity."<sup>95</sup> Arguing that birth control was antinationalist—and, indeed, a form of national suicide (as the historical example of France illustrated)—Nafi'a urged that Malthus's population doctrine be reconsidered. Instead, he called for a return to the belief in the strength of population numbers as the vital force (*quwwa hayawiyya*) of the nation. Population discourse thus entered what Roger Owen has termed "the ideology of economic nationalism," which entailed the assertion of Egyptian national identity in the consolidation of independent economic interests in industry, agriculture, and finance.<sup>96</sup>

How, then, was the relationship between Egypt's population and natural resources to be judged? According to Nassif,

All these reflections lead me to determine the demographic optimum based on two essential elements (positive, concrete and measurable): on the one hand, *standards of living*, as objectively prescribed by specialists as necessary and useful for the normal activity of an individual, given geographical conditions; and on the other hand, *resources*. Insofar as resources can support the requirements of *standards of living*, one should not invoke the necessity of birth control.<sup>97</sup>

To determine the demographic policy that a country such as Egypt should follow, he argued, one had to assess Egypt's population growth in relation to the standard of living of its inhabitants, relying on the concept of a "welfare optimum." The concept of a welfare optimum was developed by E. F. Penrose (an American population theorist who had written on Japan) and signaled a consensus among qualified individuals on the requirements for optimum welfare (e.g., biochemists determining the optimal food requirements for physiological welfare; medical scientists determining public hygiene needs; architects determining housing needs; and so forth).<sup>98</sup> "In the case that national resources suffice to cover actual and future needs, one should not hesitate to allow the population to follow its natural course."<sup>99</sup>

Nassif's lengthy and sophisticated theoretical prolegomenon was followed by a far more detailed analysis and evaluation of Egypt's standard of living in comparison with its resources. In evaluating "*les niveaux de vie*," Nassif relied on various scientifically established criteria. "In demonstrating that agriculture has amply covered the needs of an eminently prolific population and that it will continue to do so in the coming decade, one can perhaps prove that the deterioration of the standards of rural life will not be a definite consequence of demographic growth in Egypt."<sup>100</sup> Nassif contested the notion that standards of living were inversely related to increases in population size. For Nassif, people were resources of national wealth. If resources and standards of living were commensurate, there would be no need to reduce birthrates or arrest population growth.

Nassif analyzed what he deemed the three component factors of standards of living: the nutrition of the fellah, health and labor productivity, and housing. Taking each factor, he tried to show how they might be improved irrespective of population size, thereby contesting Cleland's arguments. He claimed that malnutrition had been inadequately

studied; innovations in irrigation techniques and affordable medical treatment had been shown to reduce the incidence of schistosomiasis and ancylostoma; and the successful creation of several model villages had led to improvements in hygiene and sanitation.

Disagreeing with Cleland's superficial assessment of population only in terms of already cultivated agricultural land, Nassif saw no reason to assume that an increase in population would be problematic if the increase in the rate of agricultural production continued and innovations in irrigation, draining, and cropping techniques were incorporated—without any consideration for industrialization or external immigration.<sup>101</sup> The only “population problem” Nassif admitted to was inequities in the spatial distribution of the nation's inhabitants. Foreshadowing what would within a decade become, a crucial part of Egypt's future population policy, Nassif suggested internal colonization (*une véritable politique de colonisation intérieure*) to obtain an optimal distribution of population.<sup>102</sup> Thus, at the same time that the barren lands in the northern Delta were being reclaimed, he suggested, a massive transplantation of people—a grandiose plan for interior colonization—could be coordinated. Nassif felt he had proved that the standard of living of the fellah was not as low as Cleland would have had people believe, that it had been ameliorating gradually but surely over the previous decade, and that it would continue to improve, participating in the gradual and natural evolution of the nation toward a better social future.<sup>103</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Nassif and Cleland represented two poles of an important debate—one that was to dominate the Egyptian political scene for the remainder of the century. Cleland represented the triumph of neo-Malthusian thought in population debates, the perspective that later became hegemonic. Nassif, by contrast, represented an evolutionary perspective holding that population should not become an object of conscious political strategy, but was best left to natural laws. More subtly, however, Nassif argued for the privileging of social, cultural, and historical specificity in determining the optimum population of a nation, corresponding to the evolution and complexity of its social and economic structure. For both authors, the formation of a leading nationalist elite that would direct the economy and polity of Egypt—and the demographic mass toward their own well-being—was essential.

The considerable discrepancy between these two perspectives, however, should not blind us to the limits of the interwar discourse on population. Both views remained imprisoned in naturalism—itsself the legacy of Malthusian thought on discussions of population in the 19th and 20th centuries. Indeed, Karl Polanyi has linked Malthus to the emergence of naturalism in the sciences of man.<sup>104</sup> In this respect, it is important to note the influence of Malthus on Darwinian theories of natural selection and on Herbert Spencer's discussion of the necessary antagonism between Individuation and Genesis.<sup>105</sup>

The evolutionary perspective of Nassif, then, and the neo-Malthusianism of Cleland were in effect linked through the naturalism of the Malthusian tradition. In particular, Nassif and Cleland remained similar in their attribution of overpopulation and poverty to natural laws, evolutionary or otherwise. Perhaps there is no greater evidence of this than the egregious omission in their writings on population of the effect of the distribution of wealth on the problem of poverty. Yet it was the acute nature of the social and economic



state of Egypt's agricultural laborers and the impending crisis of the social reproduction of labor power (as manifested in starvation, disease, and misery) that rendered the problem of population salient in the first place.

The question of Egypt's putative overpopulation surfaced at this time as a potential obstacle to economic development, particularly if biological reproduction was outstripping agricultural and industrial production. The promotion of a population plan related to the proper management of the relationship between the population (the problem of labor) and the natural resources of the nation (the problem of land). Given the dire state of Egypt's economy in the post-Depression period—and, in particular, the dependence of the Egyptian economy on international cotton prices—writers spoke of a crisis of agriculture in the 1930s. With a decline in the total value of agricultural wages, rents, and production, and a radical drop in the nominal value of the cotton crop, the postindependence period was characterized by an attempt at economic recovery and the reformulation of Egypt's major social problems along the lines of social welfare and etatism.<sup>106</sup> In many respects, the focus on population represented a naturalized explanation of Egypt's agricultural crisis and the problem of rural poverty.

The question of population (i.e., the population growth rate outstripping the rate of agricultural growth) was thus a translation of the dire state of Egypt's agrarian population. This was further underscored by the increased politicization of the countryside and urban centers in the late 1930s and 1940s, as seen in peasant jacqueries, an increase in rural crimes committed against property holders, a movement toward unionization and more militant labor organization, and the increase in student protests and demonstrations.<sup>107</sup> Rather than attribute poverty or overpopulation to existing social, economic, and political conditions of existence, however, the authors in question relied on the "inexorable laws" of nature as explanatory devices. The flood of writings on population between 1936 and 1942 thus represented several interrelated concerns: fears regarding the ability of the working classes to reproduce themselves in a viable fashion (one that could keep up with the demands of labor discipline and agroindustrial production); the need to coordinate the organization of production with that of biological and social reproduction; and the shift of the problematic away from the redistribution of landed property to the reduction of numbers or the improvement of standards of living. This entailed a focus on the problem of population (a naturalization of poverty) and thus redirected the problematic away from the redistribution of wealth (in particular, landed property).

As we have seen in the case of 1930s Egypt, those who were engaged in debates on population viewed the problem of poverty as (1) a problem of excessive fertility, (2) a dearth of natural resources, (3) the inefficient exploitation of natural resources (land or labor), or (4) the improper distribution of resources among the population. The first two (barren lands and fecund bodies) were explanations that naturalized poverty as the result of "inexorable natural laws" and, hence, suggested neo-Malthusian solutions for the reduction of the birthrate. The second two were social and political explanations, which placed the question of the moral and material welfare of the population within a political framework of social reform. In all cases, however, the problem of population was inextricably linked to the state as the arbiter of social welfare, which first and foremost was an interventionist project—whether accomplished through a population policy, a program for land reclamation or social welfare, or the moral education of the demographic masses.

In this article, I have argued that the constitution of population both as an object of knowledge requiring observation and management and as a social problem to be modified for the progress of the human race took shape in Egypt in the interwar period. Population came to be thought of *not* as an agglomeration of disparate populations, but as a homogeneous mass whose quantitative and qualitative characteristics could be observed and analyzed—in effect, taken as an object of study. Thus, population became subject to laws and regularities, which needed to be studied to effect the proper transformation of the social and natural world, to align the fecundity of bodies with that of the soil.

Population, framed as the quantity versus the quality of the nation's inhabitants, was addressed as a problem of the reduction of birthrates (barren lands and fecund bodies), and of the improvement of the characteristics of the population (social welfare). As such, discussions of health and hygiene were as crucial to interwar population discourse, as were discussions of birth control. This article has therefore explored the emergence of population discourse in interwar Egypt as the conjuncture between the discourses of population and those of social welfare, specifically as related to women and the peasantry. Throughout the interwar period, I argued, social reformers systematically targeted women and the peasantry, those responsible for the reproduction of labor power and the extraction of wealth from the land, for both social uplift and population control.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Wendell Cleland, "The Necessity of Restricting Population Growth in Egypt," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-Misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 279.

<sup>2</sup>See *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937); Hanna Rizk, "Population Policies in Egypt," in *The Fifth International Conference on Planned Parenthood, Report of the Proceedings 24–29 October 1955, Tokyo, Japan* (London: International Planned Parenthood, 1955), 38; Haifa Shanawany, "Stages in the Development of a Population Control Program," in *Egypt: Population Problems and Prospects*, ed. A. R. Omran (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1973), 193.

<sup>3</sup>The quote is from Mustafa Fahmi, "Hal min al-khayr li-misr fi zurufiha al-haliyya wa-fi nitaq hajatuha al-harbiyya 'an tu'amim fiqrat tahdid al-nasl?!" *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 113.

<sup>4</sup>David Horn has described this process in detail for Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on the formation of reproduction and welfare as objects of social-scientific knowledge and new social technologies "intended to confront the 'problem' of declining fertility." Ann Anagnost has explored the idea of China as a nation that is "excessively populous," analyzing how the meaning of the one-child policy expanded from a "remedy for under-development" to a "a sign of the modern itself." Both authors treat population as a discursive construction. That is, they do not engage with the question of whether China is really overpopulated or Italy really under populated. They treat demographic programs and their cultural meanings neither as effects of objective crises nor as "mere propaganda" but, rather, as solutions to a culturally constructed problem. My intentions in this article are similar. See David Horn, *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Ann Anagnost, *Narrative, Representation and Power in Modern China* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 117–37. Recent works in Middle East studies that have addressed the construction of population are Kamran Asdar Ali, *Planning the Family in Egypt: New Bodies, New Selves* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, *Birthright the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Timothy Mitchell, "The Object of Development," in idem, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth M. Cuno and Michael J. Reimer, "The Census Registers of Nineteenth-Century Egypt: A New Source for Social Historians," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (1997): 193–216.

<sup>6</sup>Roger Owen, "The Population Census of 1917 and Its Relationship to Egypt's Three 19th Century Statistical Regimes," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 9 (1996): 457–72.

<sup>7</sup>Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 246.

<sup>8</sup>See, for example, Ali Bey Fu'ad, "Tahdid al-nasl," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 48–56; Abdel Hakim al-Rifa'i, "Mushkilat al-sukkan fi misr," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 135–49; and Fahmi, "Hal min al-khiyr li-misr?"

<sup>9</sup>I borrow the term "total social fact" from Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990 [1925]).

<sup>10</sup>I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of *IJMES* for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg, "Introduction," in *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, ed. Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1–17.

<sup>12</sup>After *infatih*, population agendas shifted away from a notion of family planning as embedded within a social welfare model of the state toward a neoliberal model in which population control was isolated and disaggregated as a component of economic development: see Omnia El Shakry, "Reproducing the Family: Biopolitics in Twentieth Century Egypt" (unpublished ms, author's files).

<sup>13</sup>See Mark Adams, *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*, ed. Mark Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

<sup>14</sup>R. Goldscheid, "Discussion," in *Proceedings of the World Population Conference, 29 August–3 September, Geneva*, ed. Margaret Sanger (London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1927), 104–105.

<sup>15</sup>Cuno and Reimer, "Census Registers," 213.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>17</sup>J. I. Craig, as cited in Abbas Ammar, *The People of Sharqiya: Their Racial History, Serology, Physical Characters, Demography and Conditions of Life* (Cairo: La Société de Géographie de Égypte, 1944), 1:215.

<sup>18</sup>See J. I. Craig, "The Census of Egypt," *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 8, 32 (1917): 209–34; *idem*, "The Census of Egypt," *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 17, 96 (1926): 434–55; and *idem*, "Statistics," *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 26, 153–54 (1935): 115–45.

<sup>19</sup>The following paragraph relies on Abbas Ammar's discussion of the unreliability of the modern Egyptian censuses: see Ammar, *People of Sharqiya*, 213–18. See also Owen, "Population Census of 1917."

<sup>20</sup>Ammar, *People of Sharqiya*, 216.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>23</sup>Timothy Mitchell, "The Character of Calculability," in *Rule of Experts*, 105.

<sup>24</sup>Talal Asad, "Ethnographic Representation, Statistics and Modern Power," *Social Research* 61 (1994): 76–77. See also Ian Hacking, "Biopower and the Avalanche of Printed Numbers," *Humanities in Society* 5 (1982): 279–95; and *idem*, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>25</sup>Craig, "Statistics," 115.

<sup>26</sup>Craig, "Census of Egypt" (1917), 210.

<sup>27</sup>Craig, "Census of Egypt" (1926), 449.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 448–54.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>30</sup>Owen, "Population Census of 1917," 469.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Mustafa Amer, "Some Problems of the Population of Egypt" (in English), reprinted from the *Annexes of the Report of the Egyptian Delegates to the International Geographical Congress* (Cambridge, 1928) (Cairo: al-Ma'arif Printing Office, 1929).

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>35</sup>Wendell Cleland, *The Population Problem in Egypt* (Lancaster, Penn.: Science Press, 1936). See also "Egypt's Population Problem," *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 28, 167 (1937): 67–87; *idem*, "A Population Plan for Egypt," *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 30, 185 (1939): 461–84.

<sup>36</sup>Hasan al-Sa'ati, "Tatawwur al-madrasa al-fikriyya li-ilm al-ijtima' fi misr," *al-Majalla al-ijtima'iyya al-qawmiyya* (National Review of Social Sciences), National Center for Sociological and Criminological Research (1964): 21–34.

<sup>37</sup>Egyptian Association for Social Studies (EASS), al-Jama'iyya al-misriyya li-l-dirasat al-ijtima'iyya, *Taqrir majlis al-'idara 'an san'a 1943* (Cairo: Matba'at al-'Atimad, 1944), 8.

<sup>38</sup>"Madrasat al-khidma al-ijtima'iyya bi-l-qahira," in Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya (DWQ), Abdin, al-Jama'iyyat, al-Jam'iyyat al-Ijtima'iyya, 1899–1952, box 203, 1.

<sup>39</sup>Cleland, *Population Problem in Egypt*, 90.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>42</sup>Wendell Cleland, "Discussion of Prof. Bentley's Paper: Fertility and Overpopulation in Egypt," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 296–303.

<sup>43</sup>Idem, "Egypt's Population Problem," 67–68.

<sup>44</sup>For a critique of Malthusian thought from a Marxist and neo-Marxist perspective, see Ronald Meek, ed., *Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb: Selections from the Writings of Marx and Engels Dealing with the Theories of Thomas Robert Malthus* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1971); and Eric Ross, *The Malthus Factor: Population, Poverty and Politics in Capitalist Development* (London: Zed Books, 1998).

<sup>45</sup>There is an extensive literature historicizing and critiquing Thomas Robert Malthus's theory of population, both empirically and theoretically. The literature on Malthus is enormous. Two excellent collections, one historical and one contemporary, are Geoffrey Gilbert, ed., *Malthus: Critical Responses*, vols. 1–4 (London: Routledge, 1998); and John Wood Cunningham, ed., *Thomas Robert Malthus: Critical Assessments*, vols. 1–4 (Surry Hills: Croom Helm, 1986).

<sup>46</sup>Cleland, "Egypt's Population Problem," 82.

<sup>47</sup>A. W. Wakil, "al-Marafiq al-'amma fi al-qarya al-misriyya," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 2 (1937): 129–48.

<sup>48</sup>On al-Wakil, see Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 32, 39; and Nancy Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars: Epidemics and the Politics of Public Health* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

<sup>49</sup>Fahmi, "Hal min al-khiyr li-misr?"; and Muhammad Awad Muhammad, "al-Nawahi al-ijtima'iyya al-khasa bi-tanzim al-nasl," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 57–75.

<sup>50</sup>Muhammad, "al-Nawahi al-ijtima'iyya," 66.

<sup>51</sup>Fahmi, "Hal min al-khayr li-misr?" 110.

<sup>52</sup>Ann Anagnost, "A Surfeit of Bodies: Population and the Rationality of the State in Post-Mao China," in Rapp and Ginsburg, *Conceiving the New World Order*, 22–41.

<sup>53</sup>Abbas Ammar, "al-Nahya al-insaniyya fi mawdu' tanzim al-nasl," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 209–11.

<sup>54</sup>Idem, "The Population Situation in Egypt and the Necessity for Planning a Population Policy for the Country," in *The Egyptian Association for Population Studies* (Cairo: Imprimerie Misr SAE, 1960), 5–17.

<sup>55</sup>Hamed El-Sayed Azmi, "The Growth of Population as Related to Some Aspects of Egypt's National Development," *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 28, 168 (1937): 267–303.

<sup>56</sup>See Mirrit Boutros Ghali, *The Policy of Tomorrow* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953 [1938]); 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shati'), *al-Rif al-Misri* (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Rahmaniyya, 1936), a collection of articles printed in *al-Ahram* in 1935.

<sup>57</sup>See Ra'uf Abbas, *Jama'at al-Nahda al-Qawmiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 1986).

<sup>58</sup>Mustafa Najib, "Mirrit Butrus Ghali," in *A'lam misr fi al-qarn al-'ishrin* (Qalyub: al-Ahram Printing, 1996), 467.

<sup>59</sup>Ghali, *Policy of Tomorrow*, 49. Within a few years, Ghali radicalized his arguments, making the redistribution of national wealth the pivot of Egypt's national regeneration: see his *al-'Islah al-zira'i: al-milkiyya, al-ijar, al-'amal* (Cairo: Jama'at al-Nahda al-Qawmiyya, 1945).

<sup>60</sup>Cleland, *Population Problem in Egypt*, 110.

<sup>61</sup>The assumption that standards of living and population growth are inversely related can be traced back to Malthus. For a critique, see T. Sowell, "Malthus and the Utilitarians," in Cunningham, *Thomas Robert Malthus* 1:210–16.

<sup>62</sup>Cleland, "Population Plan for Egypt," 479.

<sup>63</sup>At the core of debates on Malthus's theory of population are the questions of the origin of poverty, its relationship to progress, and the perfectibility of man and society: see Robert Harry Inglis Palgrave, ed., "Population," in *Palgrave's Dictionary of Political Economy*, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1927); and Sowell, "Malthus and the Utilitarians," 210–16; D. Harvey, "Population, Resources and the Ideology of Science," in Cunningham, *Thomas Robert Malthus*, 1:308–35; E. N. Santurri, "Theodicy and Social Policy in Malthus' Thought," in Cunningham, *Thomas Robert Malthus*, 1:402–18.

<sup>64</sup>Cleland, *Population Problem in Egypt*, 109–10.

<sup>65</sup>Muhammad, "al-Nawahi al-ijtima'iyya," 61.

<sup>66</sup>Kamal al-Din Effendi Fahmi, "Tanzim al-nasl fi ba'd al-'aqtar—khatina fi misr," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 118–29.

<sup>67</sup>Fu'ad, "Tahdid al-nasl"; Fahmi, "Hal min al-khayr li-misr?"; Fahmi, "Tanzim al-nasl fi ba'd al-'aqtar."

<sup>68</sup>Fu'ad, "Tahdid al-nasl," 51; Fahmi, "Tanzim al-nasl fi ba'd al-'aqtar," 126.

<sup>69</sup>Fu'ad, "Tahdid al-nasl," 49, 51.

<sup>70</sup>Ministry of Finance, *Almanac for the Year 1935* (Cairo: Government Press, 1935), 286.

<sup>71</sup>An official Egyptian delegation was sent to the 1925 First General Congress on Child Welfare in Geneva, and an Egyptian delegate was sent to the Congrès International de la Protection de l'Enfance, held in Paris in 1928: in DWQ, Abdin, Mu'tamarat, 1925–29, box 59.

<sup>72</sup>DWQ, Abdin, al-Jama'iyyat, al-Jama'iyyat al-Ijtima'iyya, 1899–1952, box 203; and Abdin, al-Jama'iyyat, al-Jama'iyyat al-Ijtima'iyya, 1902–1949, box 204.

<sup>73</sup>Najib Bey Mahfuz, *The History of Medical Education in Egypt* (Cairo: Government Press, 1935), 88.

<sup>74</sup>Ministry of Finance, *Almanac for the Year 1929* (Cairo: Government Press, 1929), 160.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Cleland, "Population Plan for Egypt," 470.

<sup>77</sup>Mohamed Shalaby, *An Experiment in Rural Reconstruction in Egypt* (Cairo: Egyptian Association for Social Studies, 1950), 17.

<sup>78</sup>Ahmed Husayn, "Tajarib islah al-qarya fi misr," *Shu'un Ijtima'iyya* 2, 7 (1941): 61–67; Shalaby, *Rural Reconstruction in Egypt*, 17–18. On Husayn, see Amy Johnson, *Reconstructing Rural Egypt* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

<sup>79</sup>Husayn, "Tajarib 'islah al-qarya fi misr"; and EASS, *Taqrir majlis al-'idara*, 15.

<sup>80</sup>Husayn, "Tajarib 'islah al-qarya fi misr."

<sup>81</sup>EASS, *Taqrir majlis al-'idara*, 18–19.

<sup>82</sup>Husayn, "Tajarib 'islah al-qarya fi misr"; and EASS, *Taqrir majlis al-'idara*, 16.

<sup>83</sup>Husayn, "Tajarib 'islah al-qarya fi misr."

<sup>84</sup>Marcel Vincenot, "Réflexions sociales sur le fellah," *La Revue du Caire* 4, 34 (1941): 437–50; Galal Husayn, "al-'islah al-ijtima'i fi al-rif," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 3 (1937): 181–98; Abdel Hamid Ibrahim Salih, "al-Fellah, kayfa narqi?" *Shu'un ijtima'iyya* 1, 4 (1940): 92–96.

<sup>85</sup>Royal Society of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Section, *Improving the Lot of the Egyptian Fallah: The Model Village at Bahtim* (Cairo: Société Royale d'Agriculture, n.d.)

<sup>86</sup>Mahmud Shakir Ahmad, "Mashru'at wizarat al-sihha al-umumiyya li-'islah al-qarya al-misriyya wa-rafa' mustawa ma'ishat al-fallah sahhiyyan wa-ijtima'iyyin," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 2 (1937): 73–100.

<sup>87</sup>Elie Nassif, "L'Égypte est-elle surpeuplée?" *L'Égypte Contemporaine* 33, 208 (1942): 641. An Arabic synopsis of Nassif's article appeared in the same issue under the title, "Hal tashku misr min al-izdiham bi-l-sukkan?" (pp. 775–91). Nassif was also a member of the Royal Society of Political Economy, Statistics and Legislation, which was founded in 1909, and which published the journal *L'Égypte Contemporaine*.

<sup>88</sup>Corrado Gini, "The Cyclical Rise and Fall of Population," in *Population: Lectures on the Harris Foundation 1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 4.

<sup>89</sup>Nassif, "L'Égypte est-elle surpeuplée?" 621–38. The "Anglo-Saxon doctrinaires" included William Beveridge, Allyn Young, A. M. Carr-Saunders, Edwin Cannan, Hugh Dalton, and Lionel Robbins. For an overview, see E. F. Penrose, *Population Theories with Special Reference to Japan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1934), 49–55.

<sup>90</sup>Corrado Gini, "Some Considerations of the Optimum Density of a Population," in *Proceedings of the World Population Conference*, 118–22; Nassif, "L'Égypte est-elle surpeuplée?" 629.

<sup>91</sup>Nassif, "Hal tashku misr min al-izdiham bil-l-sukkan?" 777–78.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 635–36.

<sup>93</sup>Muhammad Hasan, "Mushkilat al-nasl fi misr," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 183–86; Hasan al-Banna, "Ra'y fi tahdid al-nasl min al-wajha al-islamiyya," *al-Majalla al-tibbiyya al-misriyya* 20, 7 (1937): 217–22.

<sup>94</sup>Hasan, "Mushkilat al-nasl fi misr," 185–86.

<sup>95</sup>Abd al-Majid Nafi'a, "al-Dawa' ila tahdid al-nasl: jarima qawmiyya la darura ijtima'iyya," *Shu'un Ijtima'iyya* 2, 5 (1941): 34–39.

<sup>96</sup>Roger Owen, "The Ideology of Economic Nationalism in its Egyptian Context: 1919–1939," in *Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890–1939*, ed. Marwan Buheiry (Beirut: American University in Beirut Press, 1981); Mourad Magdi Wahba, *The Role of the State in the Egyptian Economy: 1945–1981* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1994); Robert Tignor, *State, Private Enterprise and Economic Change in Egypt: 1918–1952* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>97</sup>Nassif, "L'Égypte est-elle surpeuplée?" 617–18.

<sup>98</sup>See Penrose, *Population Theories*, esp. 72–91.

<sup>99</sup>Nassif, "L'Égypte est-elle surpeuplée?" 636–37.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 639.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 720.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 767.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 768.

<sup>104</sup>Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944), 125–26.

<sup>105</sup>See Palgrave, "Population," 162–69.

<sup>106</sup>Joel Beinin, "Egypt: Society and Economy, 1923–1952," in *Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*. The Cambridge History of Modern Egypt, vol. 2, ed. M. W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 321. See also Omnia El Shakry, "Etatism: Theorizing the Revolutionary State," in *The Great Social Laboratory: Reformers and Utopians in Twentieth Century Egypt* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services, 2002).

<sup>107</sup>See Nathan J. Brown, *Peasant Politics in Modern Egypt: The Struggle against the State* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990); Ra'uf Abbas, *al-Haraka al-ummaliyya fi misr, 1899–1952* (Cairo, 1967); Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Ahmed Abdallah, *The Student Movement and Nationalist Politics in Egypt* (London, 1985).