

The Effect of the State

Timothy Mitchell
Department of Politics
New York University

This paper was published in Arabic as Chapter 5 of *Misr fi al-khitab al-amriki* [Egypt in American Discourse], translated by Bashir al-Siba'i (Damascus: Dar `Iybal, 1992). An earlier version was presented at a workshop on "State Creation and Transformation" organized by the SSRC/ACLS Joint Committee on the Near and Middle East, Istanbul, September 1-2, 1989.

Much of the recent writing on the state in Middle Eastern studies has shared a common image of its subject. The state is conceived as a free-standing object, located outside society. The image is a topographical one, in which state and society each occupy their own space and enlarge or contract only at the other's expense. This imagery is reflected in the title of the SSRC conference on the Middle Eastern state held at Aix-en-Provence in 1988, "Retreating States/Expanding Civil Societies," and recurs in many of the papers presented there. Episodes of state expansion are described as the "penetration" or "trespassing" or "intrusion" of the state "into" society (or "into" the economy, or education, or some other social space). Such territorial expansion is taken to represent an increase in power; as the power of the state grows that of society weakens, and vice versa.

This way of thinking of the state is highly problematic. Its topographical metaphor is binary, dividing the social world into two neatly opposed spheres, and essentialist, picturing each sphere as a separate object that has unfolded itself through time. I would argue that there never was such a thing as the state, in this essentialist and binary sense. This is not to dismiss the phenomenon of the state as a mere mask or illusion. To do so would simply substitute for the state some supposedly more real object standing behind the mask, such as a ruling class. Rather than assuming state and society to exist as two opposed objects, spaces, or forces, however, I think one needs to

begin with the very distinction between state and society and examine it as a discursively produced effect. (The word discursive does not mean ideological, which again suggests a mask with something more real, or material, behind. I use it to avoid the distinction between ideological and material, a distinction that, as I will suggest, is part of a set of assumptions actually given to us, in part, by those everyday practices we call the state.) It can be shown that over the last 150 or 200 years, in the case of the Middle East, new kinds of social and political practice have attempted to shape the social world in terms of the seemingly fundamental opposition between state and society. This distinction is related to a set of other distinctions, such as public versus private and political versus economic. These in turn correspond to a series of more general oppositions present in the way we think about and organize the world, such as form versus content, structure versus behavior, and indeed ideal or ideological versus material.

The argument that follows falls into three parts. First I want to show how the line separating state and society, which the topological metaphor takes for granted, on close inspection turns out to be quite elusive, shifting and unstable. Politics does not consist simply of an object or agent on one side of this line, the state, attempting to impose its will on the other side, society, and vice versa. Rather, the political includes, more fundamentally, the process of drawing and re-drawing this line of difference. Second, I want to consider closely how this line of difference is produced. I will suggest that an alternative

metaphor to the topological one, that of form versus content, corresponds better to the kinds of practice that create the effect of state versus society (and in fact is the more traditional metaphor of political theory). The task, it follows, is to understand those modern political techniques that enable certain kinds of social practice to appear as "form" and others merely as "content." I will discuss two examples from the Middle East of practices that make the state appear to be this form that stands outside society--the construction of frontiers and the construction of modern legal systems. Third, I want to use this approach to reconsider certain political phenomena that existing approaches to the state label as "corruption" or "failure." The pervasiveness of these supposedly secondary phenomena may in fact be telling us that the ways we have looked at the state have been wrong.

Forming the State

The concepts of state and society provide a vocabulary with which to distinguish, perhaps most frequently, between the political sphere and the economic. This is not surprising. One of the most characteristic features of modern capitalism, after all, is the ability to seem to isolate the day-to-day functioning of the economy from the realm of politics. The separation is reflected

in the papers from the Aix conference on "Retreating States," whose most common theme is the changing relationship between the state and the economy. However much the state is said to have at times "intruded" into the economy, the distinction between these two objects is accepted in the Aix papers as routinely as the more general distinction between state and society. If one looks at the recent history of a region like the Middle East, however, one can see how recently this seemingly obvious distinction emerged, and begin to explore its problematic status.

Consider the case of the formation of the modern Egyptian state in the nineteenth century. This process was closely intertwined with the creation of the country's dependent capitalist economy; so closely, in fact, that the two processes are difficult to separate. Arguably the most significant economic change of the nineteenth century was the transformation of land into a privately owned commodity. This involved the elaboration and enforcement of a complex repertoire of private rights, including first the right to mortgage or inherit a usufruct, then the right to buy and sell land, and then, crucially, the right of a creditor to have farmers dispossessed of their land for failing to pay their debts. These new economic practices took shape as a new legal arrangement, which operated through a system of courts, bailiffs, and armed local police forces. Indeed in the 1870s a British parliamentary report described the new legal system as simply a machinery for transferring peasants off the land and converting their fields into large estates. The new estates, owned by private individuals or land investment companies,

typically gave their workers in place of wages the barracks-like housing of so-called "model villages" and a small plot of land. The workers were closely policed and supervised, and their villages, subsistence plots, agricultural tools and even domestic animals all remained the property of the estate. An economy based on production for the European market was created out of such practical arrangements.

These arrangements, however, were at the same time a form of existence of the new Egyptian state. Where exactly in rural Egypt can the "economy" be said to end and the "state" begin? It was not simply that private estates exercised local powers equivalent to those of a state and that the state was supportive of such private powers, but that many of those practices that one can describe in economic terms as the characteristic workings of a system of private property can be described in legal and political terms as the existence of the state. One cannot talk, under these circumstances, of a changing "relationship" between two pre-existent entities, state and economy. The state was not simply an external agent that "intruded" into the "economy" to alter the way it worked. The practices out of which new economic relations were shaped--private rights and their enforcement, wage labour and its supervision, courts and their powers, the organization of armed force and infrastructure--were in many cases the same practices through which the thing we call the modern state came into being.

Of course, these practices established arrangements and vocabularies that discursively distinguished the "private" rights of landowners from the "public" apparatus of the state set up for their enforcement, and this distinction came to have increasing political significance. But to incorporate it uncritically into one's analysis as though it named two clearly separable historical entities, society and the state, is highly misleading.

If one prefers to think of the state in terms of its personnel rather than its rules and institutions, the picture is hardly different. From this point of view, the modern Egyptian state developed in the nineteenth century out of the household and retinue of the ruling pasha (later khedive), whose power and wealth were consolidated in the second half of the century by becoming the country's largest "private" owner of land. The household built palaces, estates, ministries, schools, railways, canals and ports with private loans from private European banks, making no practical distinction between a state treasury and a privy purse (Landes 1958:97). In 1876, when the accumulated debts of this household-state could no longer be serviced by further loans from its bankers, a committee representing their interests was set up to run its financial affairs. The British representative, Baring, although appointed by his government, was a member of the family whose bank (of the same name) was, along with Rothschild's, the leading nineteenth-century financier of European governments, and a major owner of the Egyptian debt. The committee placed the agricultural estates of the ruling family (now called "State Domain" lands) under the direct management of

Rothschild's Bank. Thus one had a "state" whose commercial and financial dealings were indistinguishable from those of a vast landowning household, and were now effectively managed by the banking houses of Europe. When the European creditors cashiered Egyptian army officers and provoked the nationalist revolt of 1881-82, the British army occupied the country and Baring became its effective ruler. Egyptian agriculture, infrastructure and finance were reorganized to pay the bankers their debts and transform the Nile valley into a profitable cotton-producing subsidiary of the European world economy. In this reorganization, and in documents like the annual reports from the subsidiary to the British parliament, a careful distinction was made between the "private" realm of the economy and the "public" apparatus of state finance and British supervision. But these distinctions were elaborated as a part of the functioning of political control, and do not define two original and neatly separable objects.

Cases of European colonization show especially clearly how the state and the economy are constructed in the same process as apparently separate realms. In some instances the historically contrived nature of the separation is striking, as with the case (to step outside the Middle East for a moment) of colonial India--where the colonial state was first established as a private company. The East India Company conducted trade, collected tax revenue, administered its own courts and legal system, maintained an army, waged war and signed peace treaties, all for the profit of its British shareholders (Cohn [1989])

describes the legal debates that accompanied this arrangement). These commercial activities were increasingly regulated by acts of parliament, and finally transformed after the 1857 uprising into the Imperial Government of India. There was no exact equivalent of the Indian case in the Middle East, although foreign corporations could acquire commercial concessions with powers equivalent, within a given realm, to those of a modern state. Well known examples include the Suez Canal Company in Egypt, Aramco in Saudi Arabia, and the Société de la Régie in the Ottoman Empire. The Régie was a tobacco company owned by three European banking groups that in 1883 obtained a monopoly over the production, transport, warehousing and consumption of all tobacco in the Empire. Tobacco was the Ottoman Empire's most valuable agricultural product and export commodity, and the company employed a large network of agents and inspectors to enforce control (Quataert 1983:13-18). Thus even as modern Middle Eastern states came into being, their sovereignty was something liable to be shared with banks, private estates, or foreign commercial monopolies.

Perhaps the closest Middle Eastern parallel to the relationship between the British Government and the East India Company, however, was the one between the British and the World Zionist Organization, whose original program had been partly modelled by Theodore Herzl on chartered colonization companies like the East India Company (Sayegh 1966:67-71). Cooperation between Britain and the Zionist movement is usually said to have begun with the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, but the

Declaration originated in a Zionist request in January 1917 that the British Government recognize and support the establishment of a "Jewish Company for the Colonisation of Palestine by Jews," referred to in a later memo as the "Jewish National Colonising Corporation." The powers of this corporation, according to the original request,

shall be such as will enable it to develop the country in every way, agricultural, cultural, commercial and industrial, and shall include full powers of land purchase and development, and especially facilities for the acquisition of Crown lands, building rights for roads, railways, harbours, power to establish shipping companies for the transport of goods and passengers to and from Palestine, and every other power found necessary for the opening up of the country (Weizmann 1949, cited Sayegh 1966:68-9, italics added).

Thus the Zionist movement sought to create the powers of a sovereign state through the means of a private corporation. Although the Zionist Organization had to wait until 1948 to acquire these powers in full, the Mandate for Palestine did acknowledge the original Zionist request by providing for the establishment of "an appropriate Jewish Agency" that would "assist and take part in the development of the country." It was under these terms that the Zionist movement was able to set up many of the political, economic, legal and military organizations that were later transformed into the Jewish state. The state was set up not in opposition to an economy and society, but by

coordinating and renaming a number of pre-existing social, economic and political organizations.

If we stay with the example of Zionism for a moment, it is interesting to consider more closely how--under the slogan of "mamlachtiut" (etatism)--certain organizations of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) were incorporated into the new state of Israel after 1948 and others were not. The military organization of the Zionist Labour Movement, the Haganah, for example, was transformed into the armed forces of the state (although paradoxically, as Yoram Peri (1983) has shown, this example of mamlachtiut was in fact a means for the dominant faction within the Labour Movement, Mapai, to consolidate party control over the military, independent of Cabinet and Knesset); the departments of health, religious affairs and social welfare of Va'ad Le'umi (the Zionist Executive) became government ministries; and the various school systems (Histadrut, General Zionist, and Mizrachi) became state schools--although the Mizrachi, or orthodox, schools were labelled State Religious Schools and in practice remained under the control of religious councils. On the other hand the World Zionist Organization (also known as the Jewish Agency) remained formally distinct from the state, and retained its control over Jewish immigration and settlement. So powers that are normally an important aspect of state sovereignty were defined as lying outside the realm of the state.

In fact, in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, adopted on May 14, 1948, a proposal from one of the document's signatories to amend the phrase "We...hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state" to read instead "...the establishment of a sovereign, independent Jewish state" was rejected (Davis & Lehn 1983). It seems to have been understood by those involved that the state was not to be sovereign. Certain fundamental powers were to remain in the hands of non-state Zionist institutions, which would exercise them in the name of the Jewish people (which in practice meant the Jewish population of Israel), rather than having them exercised by the state in the name of all its citizens (who included non-Jews). For example, the Zionist Organization's land-purchasing company, the Jewish National Fund Ltd, was transformed from a British-registered into an Israeli-registered company, and the regulations of this private Israeli company forbidding the purchase, rental or working of land by Palestinians were applied to the 92.6% of the country's land area that came under state or JNF ownership (Davis & Lehn 1983). Such arrangements made it possible to discriminate in favour of the Jewish population, without incorporating the discrimination into the public laws of the state.

Similar arrangements governed social services and employment, thanks to the continued role of the Histadrut (the Jewish labour organization) as an institution formally outside the state. Before 1948 the Histadrut's role had been to create and protect an all-Jewish labour force in Palestine, and it

continued to play this role in the 1950s, barring Israeli Arabs from membership in the organization and access to the country's labour exchanges. At the end of the 1950s Histadrut policy changed, in response to a national labour shortage, "from aggressive attempts to bar Arabs from holding jobs, to permitting their flexible utilization (conditional on Jews abdicating their preferential right to employment)," and changed again in the 1960s, especially after the incorporation of low-paid Palestinian labour from the occupied territories, "to participating in the construction of a rather rigid nationality-based segmentation of the job structure" (Shalev 1989:94). Besides controlling access to the labour market, the Histadrut became Israel's largest employer, entrepreneur, and social organization. It came to play a dominant role in such sectors as the provision of health services, insurance, credit, housing, and technical education, and in the construction industry, food cooperatives, agricultural marketing, transportation and publishing. Its industrial conglomerate, Koor, made up of over 300 industrial, commercial, financial and management companies, was by 1988 generating 10% of the country's GNP (NY Times, Oct. 22 1988). By carefully controlling the access of Palestinians to the jobs, services and rewards under its control, in close coordination with military authorities, government ministries and the Labour Party, the organizations of the Histadrut played a day-to-day role in the cooptation, control or suppression of Palestinian political activity (Shalev 1989:111-14).

The activities of institutions like the Histadrut, the World Zionist Organization and the JNF--and there are several other cases one could describe, such as the rabbinical councils with their power over religious and legal affairs, or the settler organizations in the occupied West Bank and Gaza--make extremely problematic the idea of any simple opposition in Israel between "state" and "society". One might turn here to the concept of corporatism, increasingly in vogue in Middle East studies. But corporatist theory tends to retain an image of the state as a coherent and separate actor, which in response to social crisis intervenes in society to regulate the conflicts between competing interest groups (Schmitter 1985:37). This is clearly not the situation in Israel, where the "state" would appear to be, rather, the name given to certain aspects of a somewhat larger apparatus of social, economic and political management. (From a certain Palestinian point of view, this apparatus is almost coextensive with Israeli society itself. "Israel is not simply the Knesset," writes Sari Nuseibeh. "To think this is to be blind to the picture. Israel is...the long queues of women standing in front of the post office in Jerusalem to collect their social security...It is Zaki el-Mukhtar on Radio One at your service. Israel is the business licences, the building permits, the identity cards. It is the Value Added Taxes, the income taxes, the television taxes...It is also Dedi Zucker, Meron Benvenisti, Yehuda Litani and Amnon Zichroni commiserating with Palestinians at the National Palace Hotel. Israel is the Tambour [Israeli] paint used to scribble slogans attacking Hanna Siniora on the

walls" [Nusseibeh 1987, cited Tamari 1989:4].) Whatever its actual extent, the different parts of this apparatus each depend on one another, and their top officials frequently overlap or exchange places. This does not imply a monolithic structure, for different parts of the apparatus may represent different social forces (organized labor, employers, the military hierarchy, religious factions, and so on) that are in frequent conflict. Nor does it imply that the idea of the state is of no significance. Rather, it suggests that the distinction between state and society is not a boundary between two distinct objects, but a discursively constructed line. The line is historically created, and drawn and re-drawn politically.

As a Middle Eastern state set up by immigrant settlers against the opposition of an indigenous population, Israel represents a special case. But on the question of state and society, this enables it to demonstrate particularly clearly certain more general propositions. The state is not an object or site standing outside society, but the powerful effect of a set of discursive political strategies that make certain functions and personnel appear to stand apart. Rather than focussing on the policies and programs with which the state intervenes "in" society, an analysis needs to begin with the question of how they are made to appear apart, and how the line appearing to demarcate the state shifts according to changing social forces and political needs.

To illustrate this more general conclusion I will return to the case of Egypt. In the papers from the conference on "Retreating States/Expanding Civil Societies," an important topic of analysis was the shift in Egypt since the mid-1970s away from state capitalism towards the development of the private sector. One paper attributed this retreat by the state partly to the difficulties that state managers had experienced in controlling political and economic demands in the public sector, and a consequent loss of political confidence and a desire to have such demands handled instead by the private sector. This is an important dynamic, but it does not seem to me to be captured by the topological imagery of "retreating states" and "expanding societies."

In the first place, during the preceding period of state capitalism, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, "society" cannot be said to have been "contracting." On the contrary, these years saw the emergence of a powerful new social class--the post-colonial state bourgeoisie. This is not a matter of playing with definitions. The contradictory phenomenon of a social class that forms and enriches itself within the mechanisms of the state--or conversely, of a state that consists of a social class--cannot be quickly passed over, for it is another instance of the serious difficulty with seeing state and society as separate things. The state bourgeoisie is a social class for whom public office becomes a private property, a form of capital that can be developed and made the source of individual profit the way economic capital can be exploited by a capitalist bourgeoisie.

This is particularly true in circumstances like those of Egypt from the late 1950s, where private capital is scarce and there are few mechanisms for acquiring or exchanging it. In such situations public office (along with other exchangeable investments, such as a university degree, a military rank, or a political connection) becomes a valuable part of the "private" economy. The private sector does not in any simple sense contract, therefore, but takes on new forms--including those of state capitalism.

In the second place, in principle capital can usually control labour's demands more efficiently through the decentralized and depoliticized coercion of market forces and workplace discipline than through the more visible and confrontational methods of state policy. The difficulties and loss of confidence experienced by state managers represents their learning of this principle, and their partial dismantling of state capitalism represents its implementation. This need not be seen as the "contracting" of political control, however, but as a shift in methods of regulation: a reinscribing of the boundary of the state in order, consciously or not, to depoliticize certain forms of coercion. This is done by reorganizing them and relabelling them as the ineluctable market forces of the "private" sector--forces that are in fact as dependent on state regulation for their existence as are the more obvious forces of state capitalism.

Structure

I have been looking critically at an approach to the state that assumes it to be a sort of free-standing object, set apart from although intervening in another object called "society." I have argued that on closer inspection the two supposed entities are closely intertwined, and that what one finds is not a separate agent or sphere called the state but a set of practices producing the practical effect of that separation, as a line of difference that is drawn and re-drawn according to changing political and social forces. I now want to explain more carefully what I mean by a practical effect, and explore some of the characteristic ways in which it is produced.

In the first place, the notion of a line of separation, which is given to us by the topographical metaphor of state and society, is too simple. The separateness of the state generally appears to us not simply as an external object or agent, but as a complex institutional and bureaucratic order superimposed upon the social world. There is an alternative metaphor picturing this relationship, which is actually the more traditional metaphor of political theory (in both the continental tradition of Hegel and Marx and the Anglo-Saxon tradition), the metaphor of form versus content. The state can be pictured as the framework that gives a

political form to the social content--whether in the limited sense of a political constitution or in the more general sense of a system of regulations, policies, programs and institutional structures. The language of form and content enables one to think of the state as something set apart, not as a separate space or agent (as in the expanding/contracting imagery) but as a distinct dimension. It is set apart not so much by some physical or practical separation, but the way a framework is of a different order from what it enframes, or a structure from its contents.

To speak of form or structure immediately suggests a structural theory of the state. The advantage of the image of the state as a structure, rather than simply an agent, is that it seems to correspond more closely to the actual methods of the modern state. The state appears as a system of regulations, plans, programs, and frameworks, all of which would seem to be captured by the notion of structure. The problem with structural approaches to the state, however, is their tendency to take the idea of structure itself for granted. They do not ask exactly how things are arranged so that there appears to be some thing or process that we can label structure, somehow standing apart from the social world. It is in this way that I wish to approach the question of structure: not to describe and take for granted the possibility of the state as structure, but to explore the peculiarly modern kinds of social practice that continually create and recreate the effect of structure. Exactly what does this involve?

Before considering more complex forms of institutional order, I will begin with a simple and taken-for-granted way in which the state is experienced as a structure or framework: the frontier. One of the characteristics of the modern state is its distinctive form of territorial sovereignty. It claims an exclusive and uniform jurisdiction over a certain physical area, enclosed by a marked boundary. State power can be pictured in a way that was unknown to the pre-colonial Middle East, by the drawing of political maps, where states are represented as a system of lines enframing named physical spaces. These lines correspond, on the ground, to a whole series of modern innovations, many of them unknown before the twentieth century: passports, barbed wire, electrified fences, immigration officials, interrogation and inspections, visas and work permits, and the closely governed movement of millions of migrant workers, students, refugees and tourists. For these people--as well as those prevented from moving or returning--the frontier is one of the most common forms in which the effects of the state are directly experienced.

The power of enclosure (which is also experienced internally, by the thousands held within the walls of camps and prisons as political opponents, criminals, or internal refugees) depends on methods of fencing, identification, continuous policing, intelligence, and control of movement which were largely unknown to the pre-colonial Middle East. Earlier forms of political authority did not represent themselves as lines and names on maps, and did not operate on the ground by the enclosure

of space and the strict control of movement. In the modern period these innovative techniques combine to create the effect of the state as a structure or framework that enframes a particular society or nation, and thus somehow stands apart from it as a separate order or dimension. Of course the frontier is actually created out of particular social practices (inspecting, queuing, fencing, policing and so on) that are carried out by social individuals and are thoroughly embedded in the social world. But these practices are coordinated, enforced, repeated and represented (on maps, in schools, in memory) in such a way that they appear to constitute something standing apart from the social world--frame versus what is enframed, structure as opposed to content, state as opposed to society.

A second and, I would argue, analogous example is that of law. Like the frontier, the legal system is a distinctive aspect of modern state sovereignty. The rules and regulations that govern society constitute a set of fixed limits within which social interaction must occur. Like the frontier, therefore, the law provides a sort of framework. Its rules seem to form an outline or grid, set apart from concrete cases of behaviour as a system of boundaries to be respected or transgressed. Thus law appears something fixed in relation to changing facts, abstract as opposed to concrete, general rather than particular, the form of the social world rather than its content. All this seems obvious and is taken for granted. Yet before the colonial period in the Middle East, no legal system worked according to this method of abstract effects. Pre-modern law was not conceived as a

framework of abstract principles to be applied to concrete individual cases. It was composed entirely out of cases--out of precedents--and legal practice was the complex process of finding analogies and differences between the case at hand and previous relevant cases. The law consisted of the accumulated knowledge and application of these cases, not an abstract legal "order" superimposed upon concrete social "facts."

The significance of establishing the legal system of a modern state cannot be grasped simply by talking about the "codification" of legal practice, for this term takes for granted the strange effect of abstraction that we call a code. Like the construction of frontiers, codification and the application of codified laws are particular social practices embedded in the social world. But they are carried out in such a way as to create the appearance of an order that stands outside the social world. Modern law, like the frontier, provides an example of the kind of social practice that creates the novel effect of a binary world, a world that appears divided into the two opposed realms of social life and its structure, society and state.

Numerous other examples of this structuring effect could be mentioned, several of which I have analyzed elsewhere (Mitchell 1988). Besides the frontier, there are many other methods of partitioning space and controlling the movement and mixing of social groups that are characteristic of modern capitalism and the modern state. There are architectural techniques such as the model village (popular, as I mentioned, on large agricultural

estates in Egypt) or the apartheid forms of the colonial city (see Janet Abu-Lughod's [1980] study of the building of Rabat), whose geometric layouts make possible new kinds of policing and social discipline and at the same time create the effect of an architectural plan and political order that somehow precedes and stands apart from the material existence of the buildings. There is the new geometry of barracks, schools, prisons and factories, analyzed by Michel Foucault (1977) for northern Europe but equally popular as part of the colonizing process in the Middle East. The novel, state-organized phenomenon of modern schooling is set up, employing the new spatial and disciplinary methods of control but also creating a body of knowledge to be mastered before entering the "real world," as a sort of code or set of instructions-for-use. Like the law, the new instruction program appears set apart from life itself, regulating and programming the actual course of social action. Beyond schooling and the legal system, in fact, there are many other social practices in which the state takes on this form of the "program," as a structure set apart from what is programmed: codes, regulations, policies, targets, plans, statistics, and all the ubiquitous new forms of official "expertise". These are all forms in which what we call the state comes into being, and they all share this same quality: although consisting of social practices, they appear as non-material programs, outlines or frameworks that seem to stand apart from social practice, in the non-physical realm of its order or structure. Thus they also appear as the realm of ideas as opposed to things, the ideal (or ideological) as opposed to the material.

Structure is, when one thinks about it, a strangely meta-physical effect. It appears as a framework that is separate from, prior to, the actual social practices it structures. Yet it turns out to consist itself only of particular social practices. Structure is thus an effect, not a thing. It is the (very powerful) appearance certain kinds of practical arrangement take on, when their practical aspect is made to disappear from view and they come to appear as something fixed, abstract and non-material. A critique of the phenomenon of the state must somehow bring into view and explain the strange novelty of this binary, meta-physical effect.

Corruptions

Those social practices that we collectively call the state, then, operate by presenting themselves as something set apart from and other than social practice. They are made to seem set apart by their careful arrangement and coordination as apparently fixed, non-material frameworks that give order to actual practice. To achieve this effect, the binary division of the world must be quite clear. State forms must appear as pure order or structure, unalloyed with any element of the social or the private. It is interesting to consider, in this context, the phenomenon of corruption--both in the narrow and more literal

sense of the term (public deviance in the service of private ends), and in the broad sense of what I would call the corruptibility--the internal impurity and instability--of power. The analysis of corruption, even the word corruption itself, tends to reflect the binary order of appearance. The corruptibility of power, in both the narrow and the broad sense, always seems to be analyzed as something exceptional, however prevalent. This approach seems to me somewhat complicitous. Treating corruption in this way implies the initial or possible purity of state power, as something outside society. I will try to sketch out what I mean by this with three brief illustrations, all taken from the recent politics of Egypt.

First, take the problem of public corruption in the literal sense of the term. It is generally agreed that within the apparatus of the Egyptian state corruption is endemic, from the petty level of the tip and the bribe to the more notorious cases of large scale embezzlement. A former Egyptian state prosecutor explained in 1975 that the pervasiveness of corruption had "reduced the exception to the rule and the rule to an exception" (cited in Waterbury 1983:255). Yet in a certain sense this "exception" that has become a rule is never an exception. As was argued earlier, in the modern state, particularly in the circumstances of dependent capitalist development, the state bureaucracy becomes a social class for whom public office is something held as a private resource, the way capital is owned by a capitalist class. The public office is always a source of private income. So one has a public apparatus that is inevitably

corrupted, to some degree, from the start--that always is inhabited from the beginning by a "private" dimension. The language of "corruption," however, by approaching its subject as, in principle at least, an exception, ignores and helps disguise this initial and inevitable impurity of the state, in which even the purest public realm is always inhabited by its supposed opposite, the private.

Second, there is the more general problem of the corruptability of state power. Take what is perhaps the most closely analyzed set of events in post-war Egyptian politics, the crucial attempt in the mid-1960s to "mobilize" the population by means of a state-run political party, the Arab Socialist Union, that was to intervene actively in local affairs, root out corruption and opposition, and reorganize local life according to a program of state capitalist development. The failure of this initiative is usually explained, in one set of terms or another, using the overall metaphor of corruption: that is, a program that was initially singular in aim and pure in design became corrupted by the inefficiencies, disagreements or excesses that developed in its application. A proper examination of these events is beyond the scope of this paper. But I would argue that the ASU episode illustrates once again how those arrangements we call a state are always "corrupted," so to speak, from the beginning. Such sources as the memoirs of some of those involved and the records of some of their meetings show clearly how from the very start even the highest echelons of the state were composed of competing social factions--the military, landowning interests,

leftists, and so on--and that, again from the start, the mobilization policies were not a singular plan but a set of contradictory intentions in conflict with one another: to increase production, to mobilize the youth and the left, to develop powers of surveillance, to strengthen medium-sized rural landowning, and to build the domestic powers of the military. Contradictions of this sort are both a reflection and product of all the contradictory social forces out of which the policies and practices of a state are necessarily constituted.

Third, in paying attention to the inbuilt corruptibility or instability of power, a curious feature emerges. In contemporary Egypt, the subverting of power has always tended to be organized from within the institutions of the state. As mentioned earlier, among the most characteristic institutional "structures" by which a modern state like Egypt has gained a spatial and disciplinary power over its population have been the school campus, the prison and the barracks. Yet paradoxically, these same state-constructed sites have constituted the social spaces in which opposition and subversion have most readily flourished (for an analysis of this in the case of prison, see Mitchell [1990]). This is no accident. Rather, it seems to me it can be fruitfully analyzed along the lines I have been suggesting. It reflects, I think, the quite basic ambiguity of state power, and this in turn reflects the fundamental characteristic of that power that I have been trying to illuminate. The state is a system of social practices that acquires its effectiveness by ceasing to appear as social practice and seeming instead to constitute something set apart

from society. But its methods are always made up out of ordinary social elements, and so their corruption and subversion inevitably works from within.

This paper has presented an argument against the topographical image of the state, found in much of the recent writing on the subject in Middle Eastern studies. The image pictures the state as a more or less coherent space, organization or agent, and focuses political analysis on the strength, goals and reach of this entity. Even when the analysis stresses the elusiveness of the state or the fuzziness of the line that divides it from society, the assumption generally remains that state and society are nonetheless distinct spaces or things. My argument is that we should approach the state instead as a discursive effect. This is not an argument against the reality of the state, but a different and less essentialist approach to what social and political realities are like.

The paper suggested, first of all, that in considering the politics of the present, we need a better historical sense of how recently the modern distinction between state and society has come about. This development should be seen, moreover, not simply as some pre-existent power centralizing and strengthening its control over an existing society, but as the discursive

construction of social reality according to a novel distinction between society and state, private and public, or economic and political. These pairs of terms denote not opposing spaces or entities, but interrelated faces of the same process. The characteristic technique of modern nation-states, in fact, is the ability to make such interrelated processes appear as separated objects.

Second, it was argued that although this apparent separation of state and society is achieved in many ways, the most common technique is to organize social processes according to a seeming distinction between form and content, or structure and practice. Taking the establishment of national boundaries and the elaboration of modern legal codes as typical illustrations of this technique (alongside schooling, architecture, language and numerous other possible examples), it was shown how everyday social practices can be arranged to create the effect of something more than social practice--a boundary, a code, a structure, an institution, or some other analogous abstraction--that stands apart from practice and provides it with an order and framework. Such appearances of framework or structure (which remain elusive, practical effects, not distinct objects) represent the characteristic political method of the modern social order. The most pervasive example of this method is that structural effect we call the state.

Finally, to bring out the elusiveness of this apparent distinction between structure and social practice, or state and

society, the paper offered a number of examples of the way in which the public structures of the state are inhabited by oppositional or private elements that supposedly belong apart from the state, in society. The examples of official corruption, of the more general corruptability of power, and of the way state power is often subverted by social forces that flourish within state-constructed sites, are "exceptions" that cannot adequately be explained within a spatial and essentialist image of the separateness of state from society. To get away from this image requires not just creating a different set of images or terms, but allowing such exceptions to make us question at a basic level the kinds of binary and essentialist assumptions that underlie our approaches to political phenomena.

REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Janet L. 1980. Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco.
Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cohn, Bernard S. 1989. Law and the Colonial State in India. In
June Starr and Jane F. Collier, eds, History and Power in the
Study of Law: New Directions in Legal Anthropology. Ithaca:
Cornell University Press.

Davis, Uri, and Walter Lehn. 1983. The Role of the Jewish
National Fund in the Determination of Israel's Land Policies.
In Talal Asad and Roger Owen, eds, Sociology of the Developing
Countries: The Middle East. London: Macmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the
Prison. NY: Pantheon.

Landes, David. 1958. Bankers and Pashas. London: Heinemann.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1988. Colonising Egypt. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.

----- . 1990b. L'Experience de la prison dans le discours
islamique. In Intellectuels et militants de l'Islam
contemporain, ed. Gilles Kepel and Yann Richard. Paris: Le
Seuil.

Nuseibeh, Sari. 1987. The Continuation of the Status Quo. al-Fajr
(Jerusalem), August 9.

Peri, Yoram. 1983. Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quataert, Donald. 1983. Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908. New York: New York University Press.

Sayegh, Fayez A. 1966. The "Non-Colonial" Zionism of Mr Abba Eban. Middle East Forum. 62/4:43-74.

Schmitter, Philippe C. 1985. Neo-corporatism and the State. In Wyn Grant, ed., The Political Economy of Corporatism. New York: St Martin's.

Shalev, Michael. 1989. Jewish Organized Labor and the Palestinians: A Study of State/Society Relations in Israel. In Baruch Kimmerling, ed., Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers. pp.93-133.

Tamari, Salim. 1989. Historical Reversals and the Uprising. Mimeo.

Waterbury, John. 1983. The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Weizmann, Chaim. 1949. Trial and Error: An Autobiography. New York: Harper and Brothers.