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Reconstructing Malay Identity

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*Presence of the Bushmen*, Skotnes, P. (ed.), Cape Town: UCT Press, pp.185-189.  
Wright, John. 1971. *Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg 1840-1870*. Pietermaritzburg: U. of Natal P.

4. The former include *The Gods Must Be Crazy II*, *Crazy Safari* and *Crazy Hong Kong*; among the latter are *Kalahari Harry*, *There's a Bushman on my Stoop* and the Walt Disney film *Desert Adventure*. For a perceptive review of Jamie Uys' first two films, and the reactions of anthropologists to them, see Tomaselli (1992).

5. Also exhibitions concerning the history and/or culture of other African communities. However, these can be found equally in Natural History Museums (e.g. the Zimbabwe Natural History Museum, Bulawayo).

6. Personal observation – South Africa Museum, 12 April 1996; also Royden Yates and Anne Solomon, personal communications, Cape Town, April 1996.

7. Both the exhibition text, and SANG's newsletter for April-June 1996 (SANG 1996:3) also make it clear to the visitor that this is the central theme of the exhibition.

8. Held at the South Africa Museum, Cape Town in 1991.

9. The deliberate nature of this decision would also have been reinforced by the physical locations of the South Africa Museum and the South African National Gallery, since the two institutions are situated just a short distance from one another, within the Gardens area of central Cape Town.

10. Curators, in Skotnes' view, should include contemporary artists as well as museologists.

11. For a brief biographical sketch of Farini, whose real name was William Hunt, the likely identity of his 'Earth People', and the history of other San taken to Europe and the USA for exhibition, see Parsons (1989). Morris (1987) provides some additional details, as well as information about the fate of various San skeletal and human tissue remains.

12. G/aqo' hana, who appeared in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, photographed wearing a 'Vote Swapo' T-shirt with his family.

# Reconstructing Malay identity

C.W. WATSON

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For some time now Malay politicians have been trying to reconstruct Malay identity, a task which they regard as essential if their fellow Malays are to be galvanized into a more active and committed participation within the Malaysian economy. It was this kind of thinking which, for example, could be discerned in a recent speech of the Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad to an academic audience in Wellington in New Zealand. There he laboured the point that during the colonial period the British had tried to foist on to the Malay population a sense of identity which would prove consonant with the purposes of colonial rule, but which had in fact retarded the economic and social development of the Malays.

This particular interpretation of the consequences of British rule for the evolution of Malaysian society has been more or less endorsed by scholars and in fact derives from their own analysis of colonial policy in Malaya. The argument runs that from the first decade or so of the twentieth century the British decided that the best way to administer Malaya was through the establishment of what later became known – after the term coined by J S Furnivall (1948) – as a plural society in which the different ethnic groups which composed that society, in this case the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians and the British, would each play a separate but complementary role within the economy. The British would perform the role of government assisted by the Malay aristocratic elite, the Malay commoners would be peasant farmers confined to rural areas, the Chinese would oil the wheels of the economy by controlling the market place and the Indians would run many of the essential services besides working in the plantations from which British investors would derive handsome profits. For such a system to operate successfully each ethnic group would have to be both content with the role assigned to it, and convinced that their location within a particular niche in the political economy was the natural outcome of their own particular cultural characteristics and traditions. In short an appropriate ideology had to be manufactured which would satisfy each group. This was the task upon which British scholars and administrators embarked creating as they did along the way the usual stereotypes and myths – e.g. the infamous 'myth of the lazy native' (Alatas

1977) – which were to become almost self-fulfilling prophecies, labels to which behaviour was expected to conform.

The labels which were attached to the Malays referred to 'nature's gentlemen' and spoke of them as farmers and fishermen, essentially rural people, content with the simple pleasures of life and unfitted for competitive struggle in a modern world. As people they were perceived to be cheerful, modest, unassuming, friendly, hospitable, fond of sports and, above all, deferential. (For a good illustration of this view see Swettenham 1906). Since this, in the eyes of the British, is how the Malays were – the wish being father to the perception – it was necessary for the colonial government to protect these innocent Malays and ensure they did not fall victim to the rapaciousness of others. Consequently, in their best interests they were to be tied to the soil; land which they possessed was to be inalienable and additional special reserve land was to be allocated to them.

The combination of both the policy of economic complementarity and the constant repetition of what were held to constitute the quintessential characteristics of the Malay personality meant that when Independence was obtained in 1958, the Malays had been educated – indoctrinated almost – into holding certain assumptions about themselves and their place in the new state, namely: that the civil service and agriculture were the professional domains to which they were most suited; that the land was theirs by birthright as it were – justifying the appellation of themselves as *bumiputera* (sons of the land); that commerce was a sordid occupation best left to others; that the ruling Malay party, UMNO, would continue to protect them and provide patronage and paternalism when necessary; and that they should continue to be deferential to representatives of the former colonial power as they had been in the past.

All these assumptions were anathema to Dr Mahathir, who in a controversial book entitled *The Malay Dilemma* (1970) criticized both the mentality of dependency and the Malay leadership of the time who pandered to it. As a consequence the book was banned in Malaysia and Mahathir was compelled to spend some time in the political wilderness, but in the mid-70's the justice of much of what he had to say – not



—You're a traitor, Jebat!

— Eh, Tuah, You're wrong! I'm not a traitor... I just want to amend the Constitution!  
(Zoy, 'Ragam' (Whim), Berita Minggu, 7 February 1993. Kuala Lumpur: The New Straits times Press (M) Bhd.).

This cartoon depicts two legendary heroes – Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat – whose dramatic confrontation is described in the Malay epic *Hang Tuah*. Formerly close friends, they fight when Jebat can no longer tolerate the ruler's tyranny and attempts to dethrone him. Tuah, ever faithful to the monarch despite the latter's misdoings, accuses Jebat of treachery and eventually kills him.

This cartoon was published in the Malay press around the time Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir was proposing changes to the Constitution which drastically reduced the powers of the Malay rulers of the federated states.

The UMNO (United Malays) party which Mahathir leads was always regarded as the champion of the monarchy, especially during the last years of colonial rule when the British Government was proposing in the teeth of Malay opposition to curtail its powers, and consequently has always been identified with Tuah. In this ironic cartoon, the identification is switched; UMNO and Mahathir are associated with Jebat, and to the charge that they are traitors they reply that they are simply amending the Constitution. On the same theme see Mahadzir (1996) mentioned below. I thank Mulyadi Mahamood for supplying me with a copy of the cartoon.

everything, since he held some peculiar ideas about genetics – was recognized and his time had come.

When he became Prime Minister in 1981 he began innocently enough – at least as far as the Malays were concerned – by continuing the policy of affirmative action in favour of the Malays which his predecessors had embarked upon in the aftermath of the rioting in Kuala Lumpur on 13 May 1969. Such action, implemented through what was known as the New Economic Policy (NEP), was felt to be essential to compensate for the still visible effects of colonial ideology and policy. Malays needed to be encouraged to come out of their villages and acquire the knowledge and skills which would enable them to participate fully in the modern industrializing economy, and they needed to be disabused of the idea that they were simply peasants. Affirmative action conferring special privileges was to achieve this and operated within that same framework of patronage with which Malays were familiar. Initially this policy was successful, despite the obvious dissatisfaction of the non-Malays who were justifiably ag-

grieved at some of the iniquitous consequences of the policy for them, with respect to places in tertiary education for example. However, there was one very obvious structural flaw to the whole strategy of affirmative action: so long as the redirection of the Malays depended on the continued extension of State patronage as under colonial rule, then the policy was bound to fail, since the existence of patronage simply confirmed the old paradigm of the Malays being weak and dependent and unable to compete. Mahathir himself had recognized this paradox from early on, but it is only recently that within Malay circles in general that it has won wider recognition: there were obvious reasons why for example Malay businessmen might prefer a system of special privilege. In various debates that are taking place in Malaysia at the moment, it has now become common to refer to the need for a 'paradigm shift' in recognition of this problem of how to change attitudes while at the same time maintaining continuity with the past. Various proposals and policies have emerged in recent years, but many of these new initiatives appear to be as inextricably caught up as the old ones in internal contradictions.

The fundamental problem as seen by Mahathir and the intellectuals who are close to him – who include for example the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Anwar Ibrahim – is how to root out what they see as a 'subsidy mentality' and create a new ethnic identity for the Malays. This new identity must be constituted by cultural characteristics most conducive to the demands of the next two important decades leading up to 2020, the target year for Malaysia to emerge as one of the leading developed nations of the world. In this context there is frequent mention of the new Malay (*Melayu baru*). How this individual is currently being manufactured in Malay political discourse provides a fascinating example of the way in which the process of the formation of an ethnic identity takes place within the context of the modern nation state – what Ernest Gellner (1993:3) once called 'ethno-communalist metaphysics' which he pronounced was not a significant intellectual option.

An exemplary instance of the way that political rhetoric develops the theme of ethnic identity was to be seen in a Conference organized by Malay students in Britain in March 1996. The topic of the Conference was Malay Youth in 2020 (*Anak Melayu di 2020*) and one of the keynote speeches, entitled the History of Malay Commerce (*Sejarah Perdagangan Melayu*), was delivered by the Deputy Finance Minister, Dr Afiffuddin Omar. The speech was wide-ranging, full of humour, with personal anecdotal reference to leading Malaysian personalities, and much appreciated by the student audience, but clearly there was a serious purpose to it. The principal point which Dr Afiffuddin wanted to get across was that the Malays were a nation of traders and, not as the colonial historians and their epigones would have us believe, a nation of peasants. As one might have anticipated, fundamental to the construction of a radically different Malay ethnic identity was a radical reinterpretation of received history. The argument consisted of two parts, the first demonstrating the success of Malays as traders in the past and the second showing how the status of the Malays had been reduced through the policy of the colonial government.

At the outset the tone of the speech was adversarial. It was important, he said, to get away from the notion that Malay history began in the twelfth century from when we first have written records in Malay; this was a shot at one particular school of history in Malaysia

which argues that the Malays were simple peasants until they were discovered by Arab traders who by endowing them with a religion and a script for their language provided them with an identity. Evidence for the greatness of the Malays could be found in Chinese records of the Sriwijayan Empire located in South Sumatra, which have been fruitfully used by the historian O.W. Wolters, to whom Afiffuddin made numerous complimentary comments. (There is a certain amount of irony in this, since Wolters is an Englishman whose early career was in the colonial service in Malaya.) The Sriwijayan Empire was one of the greatest in the world covering a vast archipelago and encompassing thousands of islands. The Malays, then, were commercial venturers par excellence. (Compare this to the received wisdom of the colonial period. 'It must always be realized that the Malays have never played an important part in the commercial life of the country...' Wheeler 1928: 211.)

This particular interpretation which the speaker was proposing is, as one might suspect, highly disingenuous, since it refers to a period between the sixth and tenth centuries about which we have in fact very little solid evidence, and what we do have suggests a thalassocracy in which some measure of control over local maritime trade was exercised but in which there could have been little or no control over territorial arrangements. The point at issue here, however, is simply to note both the challenge to what passes as the conventional history of the schoolbooks on the curriculum in Malaysia, and the determination to move away from the image of Malays as peasants and insist that they were (and are) commercial entrepreneurs. (There might incidentally be considerable justification for the latter, but it is not in my opinion to be found in records of Sriwijaya but in more recent history of a later period.) The points were put across with great panache and the audience were clearly attracted to this new view of the Malays. One questioner subsequently asked why this version of history was not taught in schools, to which the speaker with a shrug replied that he did not know, that he had frequently put these same points to leading academics in Malaysia but they had been unwilling to change their conservative view of things. They were still attached to their colonially-derived image of the Malay as a peasant, whereas in fact the Malay was not by choice a farmer. After all, the soils of the Malay jungles were not suited to rice-farming. He could say this with confidence because his first degree was in soil science, and he would debate the case with anyone.

A further point which was made in this same context, but one which was lost on his audience was that the triumph of the Malays in the Sriwijayan period had been achieved through cooperation with the Chinese. It was the combination of Malay diplomacy and Chinese skills which had made the southern seas so prosperous. There was no need to spell out the implications for contemporary Malaysia. Unfortunately, or so it appeared to me, that particular message lost its impact when the speaker carried away by his own rhetoric then began to talk about the colonial period and to describe how the Chinese with the encouragement of the British had exploited the Malay peasantry and systematically impoverished them through money-lending and the extension of credit. Given what had happened then, he said, it was only right that affirmative action should be taken on behalf of the Malays today, since they had suffered so much in the past. Professors at Cambridge and the LSE had no need to lecture him on the iniquities of what appeared to them to be anti-Chinese discrimina-

tion. Let them look at the figures as he had and let them see how wrongly the Malays had been treated. It was right that Malay students should be the beneficiaries of the Government support of the Malays and he was pleased to see so many students studying in Britain today on handsome scholarships, a situation very different from the one which prevailed when he had struggled as a poor student in the early 60's.

This message, however, contained all the ambivalence of the old rhetoric which he was trying to displace and a questioner very politely pointed this out. Before he made his point, the questioner said he wanted it to be understood that he was a Malay and was very grateful to the Government for the support which it provided for him. However, he could see a great danger in the continuing special provision for the Malays. The danger was that the Malays would never be truly independent, that they would continue to rely on support, rather than stand on their own two feet and consequently they would never be able to compete in the real world. What did the speaker think? The reply was exactly as might have been anticipated from a Mahathir supporter. He agreed with the questioner 200%: it was important to encourage Malays to stand on their own feet. And he gave an elaborate analogy of a temporary invalid who had become over-reliant on a crutch and now found it difficult to dispense with it. Malays should be more adventurous, more willing to take the initiative, they should take pride in their own achievements and the positive features of their own cultural heritage as he had described it.

Such remarks echoed similar sentiments expressed in a speech about Malay culture given earlier in the proceedings which was equally concerned with the Government's promotion of the new Malay but stressed a different aspect of this campaign. If historical reinterpretation had been prompted by a desire to reevaluate received tradition and consequently persuade Malays to look more confidently and positively at the challenge of new economic opportunities in the modern industrialized world, what this second speech tried to spell out was the mechanism by which the challenge might be effectively taken up. Two proposals were put forward in this context, both of which were innovative but consistent with the general strategy which Mahathir has been adopting in the last decade. The first laid stress on the Malays as a worldwide community, the second emphasized the importance of assertiveness within the global political economy of today.

The notion of the Malays as being a diasporic community has in fact already been explored under the auspices of Gappena, the Malay writers association. The very active chairman Gappena, Professor Ismail Hussein, a well-respected academic has been investigating the reach of Malay culture over some time and has established a network of links as far afield as South Africa and Latin America as well as within Asia itself. What Professor Ismail has conclusively demonstrated is that these scattered Malay communities which have become established over the centuries as a consequence of historical circumstances have retained a sense of distinctive Malay identity as well as remaining Muslim even when they have lost a knowledge of the Malay language. Furthermore, there is a desire among the Malays of the diaspora to retain links with the Malay centre. Professor Ismail's interest has been largely in language and in literature and he has been active in a campaign to elevate Malay culture as being of international importance – not such an absurd idea as it might appear to some, given that it is Malay – more or less –



which is spoken as the national language of 200 million Indonesians.

It has, however, not escaped notice that this reaching out to the community in the diaspora has potentially a number of beneficial political and economic consequences. The model which is uppermost in the minds of Asians is of course the overseas Chinese. It is well known how from as early as the last decade of the nineteenth century overtures were being made by Republicans as well as by Qing loyalists to the Chinese who were settled overseas to come to the aid of China by political support, which would include lobbying in their countries of residence, as well as direct economic aid through investment and donations. And indeed this trend continues today with an evermore determined attempt by the Chinese government to woo the Overseas Chinese – particularly those in Southeast Asia – to invest in China, much to the uneasiness of the countries of which those overseas Chinese are now citizens. It seems that this model is one which the Malaysian government would now like to emulate. Indeed the use of the word diaspora which is very recent in Malay discourse – as perhaps indicated by the still frequent misspelling in print-media – is itself suggestive of the direction of thinking. The principal difference, however, is that the Malaysian government is not so much concerned to attract investors as to create networks overseas through which Malaysians can operate.

To consolidate this new initiative the Malaysian government decided on the imaginative step of setting up an International Malay Secretariat which was formally opened in Shah Alam in Malaysia in April 1996. As was made clear by one of the prime movers in this initiative, the Chief Minister of Selangor and an important figure in Malay political circles, Tan Sri Muhammad Taib, the point will be not simply to forge cultural links but to work for the mutual economic benefit of all by creating an international business community which will have at its disposal all the latest technological advances in communications as well as the collective know-how of a successful developing economy (Muhammad 1996). At one stroke then a new political identity, the Malay Diaspora, will be created. However, there remain certain problems about the concept which have not gone unobserved.

At the student conference mentioned above in which Muhammad Taib explained the thinking behind the new secretariat one astute student asked how the concept of Malay would be defined. The point he made was that in Malaysia itself a Malay was defined as someone who spoke Malay at home, was a Muslim and observed Malay culture – in dress and food preferences. Clearly, however, that national definition would not fit the new international community of Malays. The Minister's reply acknowledged the difficulty and simply remarked that indeed a new definition would have to be constructed, since the definition which was suitable for the Malaysian context would, he agreed, not work for the international community. The more serious implications of the question, namely that in the long run once the euphoria of the initial rediscovery of Malayness had worn off, members of the new global Malay diaspora would find that there would be little which they had in common with each other was not pursued.

Another problem related to the forms of association which the members of the new community would engage in. Here to make his point the Minister made use of another favourite model for the Malaysians, the Japanese. The Japanese had shown themselves more than capable of acting in the international arena: they

were thrusting, outward going, self-confident. They were acting in the same way as the European nations had operated in the colonial period, being adventurous, full of initiative and with a sense of national mission – compare the Portuguese colonial cry 'For God and Glory'. Malaysia should now follow that example and be prepared to become internationally involved in the same way, as an exporter of ideas, technology and development – why for example should young Malaysians not volunteer to work abroad as the youth of other nations did. In seeking to emulate the Japanese Malays should observe their business practice too. Note how parochial and nationalistic they were when they went abroad, staying in Japanese-owned hotels, eating in Japanese restaurants, shopping in Japanese department stores. The key to Japanese success was in this commitment to things Japanese, and again the Malays should learn from this. Hotels, restaurants, shops should be established overseas to provide for the Malays in exactly the same way as the Japanese had created their own community abroad. The difficulty here of course is that the Japanese are usually condemned for this sort of inward-looking behaviour – Muhammad Taib himself had used the term parochial – and it is regarded as inimical rather than conducive to a harmonious world-order. In the Malaysian context in particular where so much is dependent on trying to overcome narrow cultural boundaries this turning inwards of the Malays, however much it might appear to be consistent with the Japanese model, seems a step backwards rather than a step forwards. To such objections as this two responses are usually given. The first is that international business is not a zero-sum game, in other words the pursuit of national or ethnic self-interest does not entail inevitable loss for others. Vigorous economic activity, whatever its source, will only be beneficial to the world economy. All gain from healthy competition and what appears to be narrow self-interest turns out in the long-run to be universally advantageous. This is all very familiar and corresponds to the Japanese point of view in their argument with the Americans over free trade. The second response is, however, of a different kind altogether.

It begins by conceding that an over-intensive focus on Malayness is misguided and that indeed it is a form of behaviour which is condemned by Islam. Islam knows no national or ethnic boundaries, it is a universal religion. Because Malays are good Muslims they are well aware of this point and will not be tempted into the dangers of narrow chauvinism. Their concerns in the long run are with the wider Muslim world. It is only in the short term that the bonding of Malays is being encouraged, and this policy is quite reconcilable with Muslim ethics, since Muslims are in fact encouraged to establish the welfare of their own immediate families before they embark on wider charitable actions. (Comparable with the notion of charity beginning at home.) One has therefore to reinterpret the pursuit of ethnic self-interest as a desire to provide for the welfare of the Malay family taken in its widest sense.

The argument is an ingenious one and involves slipping easily and smoothly between different kinds of discourse using the same words but slightly altering their connotations. Political, religious and socio-cultural terms combine in an almost promiscuous manner which makes it difficult to define things precisely and accurately. There are of course numerous advantages to leaving critical terms loose and open to interpretation when the intention is political and designed to promote a certain policy. Within Malaysia itself, however, doubts have been raised even among Malays themselves about

Alatas, Syed Hussein 1977.  
*The myth of the lazy Native*. London: Frank Cass.

Furnivall, J. S. 1948.  
*Colonial policy and practice*. Cambridge: The University Press.

Gellner, E. 1993. What do we need now? Social anthropology and its new global context. *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 July pp 3-4.

Hussein Mutalib 1989.  
*Islam and ethnicity in Malay politics*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Mahadzir Mohd.Khir 1996.  
'Siapa Berani – Tuah atau Jebat?' (Who's the Brave One – Tuah or Jebat?) in *Massa* (Kuala Lumpur) 30 March pp 20-21.

Mahathir Mohamad 1970.  
*The Malay dilemma*. Singapore: Asia Pacific Press.

Muhammad Taib 1996. *Mengangkat Martabat Bangsa* (Raising the dignity of a people). Interview with Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhd. Taib in *Massa* (Kuala Lumpur) 30 March, pp22-26.

Swettenham, F. 1906. *The Malay: his prejudices, arts, languages and literatures, in British Malaya*. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, pp 133-172.

Watson, C.W. 1996. The construction of the post-colonial subject in Malaysia. In *Asian forms of the Nation* (eds) Hans Antlov and Stein Tonnesson. London and Copenhagen: NIAS-Curzon Press, pp 297-322.

Wheeler, L. Richmond 1928. *The modern Malay*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

the continuing usefulness of the concept of Malay identity (Mahadzir 1996: 21). However much one tries to argue that it is useful for some purposes and not others and that a commitment to being a Malay is inconsistent neither with a commitment to being a Muslim nor a commitment to being a Malaysian – the situational argument of which no doubt many Barthian anthropologists would approve – it is clear that the affirmation of a new Malay identity as a tactic is very little different from that used by the colonial regime. It attaches a sense of distinctiveness to one's own culture and sets up an opposition and implicit antagonism to other ethnic groups, particularly those which are one's immediate neighbours. That kind of opposition, many Malay intellectuals will argue, is one which Malaysia cannot afford and which Mahathir himself knows is potentially dangerous.

The reconstruction of Malay identity which is currently under way, then, is fraught with pitfalls. It is premised on a new historical interpretation which gets away from the stereotype view of the Malays created and encouraged by the British, but paradoxically the intention itself is identical to the colonial one – it simply

substitutes one stereotype for another and in doing so reverts to a former paradigm rather than creates a new one. A strong case has been made in the past for suggesting that Mahathir was working very hard to move away from a narrow focus on Malay identity and in its stead was emphasising the idea of a Malaysian rather than a Malay identity (Watson 1996) and secondly, proposing for the Malays a Muslim rather than a narrowly ethnic image of themselves (Hussein 1989). Various initiatives he had undertaken seemed to confirm this analysis, for example the curtailment of the rights and privileges of the Malay monarchy, and the restoration of the use of English as a medium of instruction. This current boosting of Malay self-awareness, then, seems paradoxical and retrogressive. It may, however, be the case that the emphasis on the 'new Malay' is merely the dying throw in Mahathir's long-term ambition to persuade the Malays into contributing fully, actively and equally in the modern industrial economy which Malaysia is becoming. The ambition is a laudable one but the risk is great that it might lead to simply an entrenchment within that new identity exacerbating rather than alleviating ethnic divisions. □

# The politics of family planning in Egypt

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I In a work of fiction from late nineteenth century Egypt, the main character is an author who goes to the tombs outside Cairo for inspiration. Here, one day, he encounters an elderly noble who steps out from one of the graves. After a brief introduction the grave dweller asks the author to go to his house and fetch him his horse and some clothes. The author respectfully replies that he does not know where the nobleman lived. The infuriated elder curses and says:

Tell me which country you are from, for heavens sake? It's clear that you are not an Egyptian. There is no one in the whole country who does not know where my house is. I'm Ahmad Pasha al-Manikali the Minister of War in Egypt.

The author replies:

Pasha, believe me, I'm from pure Egyptian stock. The only reason why I do not know where you live is that houses in Egypt are no longer known by the names of their owner, but by the names of their street, lane and number. If you would be so kind to tell me the street and lane number of your house, I will go there and bring you the things you ask for.<sup>1</sup>

This exchange from Muhammad al Muwaylihi's novel suggests how Egyptian society changed in the late nineteenth century, after a period of almost a century of continuous European colonial presence in Egypt. This ordering of Egyptian society through regulations and numbering irrespective of personal rank and status expressed modern notions of equality and justice, backed by the ideology of European liberalism. Timothy Mitchell (1988) shows how the colonial project in Egypt ordered and disciplined the bodies and minds of the Egyptian people through the introduction of modern education, policing, censuses, registration of births and deaths, and new ideas on health and hygiene culminating in medical inspection of bodies and the

campaign for eradication of diseases. Mitchell maintains that issues of emancipation of women, the education of the populace and the rights and legality of citizenship were later ably argued by the emergent Egyptian educated classes in the expanding number of Arabic periodicals, newspapers and the new genre of literary novels. However, with increased population growth and rural-urban migration, Mitchell argues, by the end of the century the Egyptian elite itself was concerned about the crowds and the general disorderly and unhygienic conditions in the cities. This visual impact of urban crowds, the unemployed mob, aimlessly roaming youth, and people selling valueless objects, was further substantiated through the census and statistical data of the colonial, if formally independent, Egyptian State in the early decades of the twentieth century (Owen undated).

Modernizing policies and changes were hence continuous with a growing understanding of the population problem. The census data scientifically represented the 'reality' of the alarming population increase and its impact on future food distribution in Egypt. Numerical and statistical analyses were used to bring to life the relationship between overpopulation and the narrow strip of agricultural land along the Nile which is cultivable.<sup>2</sup>

Descriptions of the Egyptian population in cultural and spatial terms continue to connect present-day notions of 'Egypt' and 'Egyptian' from a development perspective to representations from the colonial past. Recent initiatives by international developmental agencies, in co-operation with the government of Egypt, play on historical themes such as subjugation of women, overwhelming population growth, lack of