

FRANK CASS

FOOD AID RECONSIDERED Assessing the Impact on Third World Countries

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The Race to Fashoda: Robinson and Gallagher Revisited

A turning point in the literature on the British occupation of the Sudan and the Upper Nile basin, 1896–1898, occurred with the publication of Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians* in 1961. Its great and lasting influence has to a large extent been due to the authors' new broad explanation of late-Victorian British expansion in Africa, seen at the same time as a forceful contribution to the general theory of imperialism. It was a theory which was regarded as a final blow to the marxist theory of imperial expansion as a function of economic interests and capital export. A central element and building stone in this theory was their interpretation of the British 'way to Fashoda'; the British decision to implement their Nile valley strategy is described as 'perhaps the critical decision of the Partition' (Robinson and Gallagher 1981 (first ed. 1961):283), and 'henceforward almost everything in Africa north of the Zambesi River was to hinge upon it' (ibid.). The present article on Robinson & Gallagher's thesis regarding the British occupation of the Upper Nile will question the conventional explanation regarding this region's encounter with European colonialism. It will also have relevance for any analysis of the Partition of Africa and the motive forces behind British expansion in the late 19th century in general.

To briefly sum up Robinson and Gallagher's theory regarding British Upper Nile policy in the 1890s: The overriding motive was 'Security of the Empire'; to protect and control the major lifeline, the Suez Canal, to the strategic and economic lynch-pin of the Empire, India. It was the fear that other European powers might take control over the Upper Nile as a lever to shore the British away from Suez, which compelled the British to occupy the regions south of Egypt. The occupation is seen as a pre-emptive measure necessitated by the rivalry with other European forces: no continental powers should be allowed a foothold upstream in the Nile basin, enabling them to exploit potential technological know-how to interfere with and reduce the flow of the Nile to throttle Egypt and thereby Britain's position at Suez. In order to forestall this danger, the Nile basin was brought under direct British rule.

According to this interpretation, the importance of the Sudan in British imperial strategy was fundamentally shaped by its conceived role as a buffer state *vis-à-vis* other European powers in the defence of British positions in Egypt. Robinson and Gallagher therefore likened it to the prototype of a buffer state, and called it 'another Afghanistan' (ibid.:475). And the existence of an Islamic and anti-British Mahdist State in the Sudan from 1884

to 1898 did not cause any serious problems for the British in Egypt. On the contrary, as long as the country lay in the hands of the Mahdi, the British were complacent (ibid.:284). The relationship between Britain and the Mahdi was a kind of collaboration by default. The reason was that, although the Mahdist state was anti-British, 'the Dervishes who held the Sudan could not cut off the flow of the river (...) for they were no engineers' (ibid.). But formal empire became necessary because of growing Mahdist weakness. Consequently, if this buffer state had not weakened, and had it not been for the strategic dangers caused by the encroaching European powers, the Mahdist state could have maintained its sovereignty.

It was this threat from other European powers in the valley that made it necessary to send Kitchener and his troops to Fashoda. Their presence activated a kind of domino-complex among British policy-makers; if the Upper Nile fell, the Sudan might fall and then Egypt would be destabilized and the British might lose their control over Suez. Robinson & Gallagher's thesis can therefore be reformulated: Had there been no European rivalry in the Upper Nile, the British fear would not have been aroused, and the occupation of the Sudan would have been unnecessary.

An important premise for the above interpretation is its assessment of the intrinsic, economic value of the Upper Nile and especially the Southern Sudan: According to the theory there was nothing there to utilize. The British policy-makers prior to the occupation did not regard the region as valuable for economic enterprise. As in the rest of Tropical Africa, they were merely scraping 'the bottom of the barrel' (Robinson and Gallagher 1953:15), making

ready for war with France for 'the mastery of these deserts' (Robinson and Gallagher 1981:372). The British extended their rule, but without expansionist motives. The British came to fight in the Southern Sudan, but not for the purpose of exploiting the resources of the region. The book also stresses an absurd, irrational element in British Upper Nile policy; the British fear about what the French and the Marchand Mission could do with the water-flow at Fashoda was based on a fantasy, because when the French arrived there, they discovered that there was 'no stone within miles of Fashoda' (ibid.:372). What took place therefore, according to Robinson & Gallagher, was a very typical example of what was called 'an imperialism without impetus' (ibid.:25). Their description of the British 'way to Fashoda' became a case which demonstrated most clearly their general theory of late-Victorian imperialism.

Robinson and Gallagher argued that any theory of imperialism should be based on a reconstruction of the contemporary motives of the policy-makers. The introduction to the 1981 edition of *Africa and the Victorians* underlined that the critics of their thesis had not succeeded in questioning their theory of motives because the criticism had mixed up causes with motives. This article follows Robinson and Gallagher's advice to 'learn the grammar of the policy-makers and construe their texts' (ibid.:25), and, 'to try and disentangle the continuities of purpose' (ibid.). Our purpose is to discuss their interpretation employing that theoretical and methodological perspective in which the explanation was formulated.

For Robinson and Gallagher, two policy-makers were of prime importance: Her Majesty's Agent in Cairo, Cromer, and the Prime Minister in

London, Salisbury. Their motives are described as if they had the same strategic aims and policies. The pivotal role of Cromer in the formulation of British Nile Valley policy is unquestionable. Robinson and Gallagher describe him as 'the puppet-master of Egyptian politics, making all dance to his strings' (ibid.:276). To the extent any difference between Cairo and London is acknowledged by the authors, Cromer is seen as more hesitant and less willing to march up the Nile than was Salisbury. At the same time it is emphasised that Cromer was *the* architect of the new British Nile Valley policy from about 1890. This article therefore focuses on Cromer's motives.

I

A reconstruction of Cromer's 'continuities of purpose' requires an understanding of and a focus on the Nile water question. Although Robinson and Gallagher in general underlined the necessity of understanding the 'world' of the Man on the Spot, they failed to acknowledge and incorporate into their analysis how the most important constraint and worry affected any ruler in Cairo's 'opportunity situation': the water question. Egypt, which the ancient Greek historian Herodotus had called the 'gift of the Nile', was a country where for thousands of years the height of the flood had been recorded as the most important event of the year, and where the fate of governments to a considerable extent had depended on their ability to give ample water to thirsty lands. Napoleon realised this relationship between water supply and political stability immediately, as shown by his remark upon his conquest of Egypt: 'In no other country does the prosperity and welfare of the

To anticipate a basic conclusion of my own investigation: I contend that Cromer regarded British occupation of the Nile basin upstream as absolutely necessary, and that he and his closest advisers drew up plans for utilization of the Nile that required permanent British military and political presence in the Sudan, years before the 'colonialist' Declassé became French Under-Secretary of State for Colonies or Marchand met with Hanotianx in 1895. To Cromer the 'reoccupation' of the Sudan had all through been a question, not of 'if', but of 'when', reflecting his assessment of Egypt's water crisis.

inhabitants depend so directly upon the government as in Egypt' (quoted in Crouchely 1938: 53). In the 1890s the Egyptian Prime Minister Nubar Pasha pin-pointed the dominant opinion, when he said: 'The Egyptian question is the irrigation question' (quoted in Willcocks 1936:67). Both policy statements and policy implementation show that Cromer concurred, and with good reasons.

If anything, economic and ecological changes made the Nile *control* question more, and not less, important during Cromer's reign than it had been under the pharaohs and when Napoleon made this remark. Egyptian agriculture had changed fundamentally in the decades prior to the British invasion in 1882 because of a revolution in irrigation methods. The old system of flood irrigation had been replaced by perennial irrigation. The dam built at Damietta and Rosetta north of the Nile delta made it possible to fill the irrigation canals with water also in the summer.

Thus, the same land could yield one or two crops more than before. The conditions for an enormous increase in cotton production (and maize and sugar) had been created. The rapidity with which this growth took place can indicate the changes in water utilization and the social and economic forces it mobilized: In 1820 cotton production and exports were negligible, whereas from 1860 onwards cotton made up about 80 per cent of Egypt's total exports. What was called the saviour of the Egyptian economy, the cotton plant, required, however, regular and ample watering in spring and summer, i.e. in those months of the year when the Nile's flow was at its lowest.

This development led to mounting political pressure on the British rulers in Cairo. As always, when the river began to rise, its height was daily chanted through the Cairo streets until it reached 16 cubits on the Nile gauge. The annual ceremony of cutting the Khalig al-Masri, the old canal flowing through Cairo, a festival involving all notables including the Khedive himself, the cabinet ministers and under-secretaries, the sirdar of the army and his staff, was as popular and central as ever. The demand for more summer water was heard from all corners of the Egyptian society — and from influential pressure groups in Britain. In Egypt the most powerful foreign trade agencies dealt in cotton (Tignor 1966:234). The big landowners owned about two-thirds of the cotton harvest. The population doubled during a few decades and reached almost ten million in 1897. The growing number of poor peasants put pressure on the government for increased and reliable water supplies. In England, the cotton industry in Lancashire wished to reduce its dependency on American cotton by increasing its imports of cheaper cotton from

Egypt, which could not be accomplished without ample and safe water supply during the low Nile season. In 1882, Egypt's foreign debt had increased to 100 million pounds, and the annual debt servicing amounted to 5 million pounds (Crouchely 1938: 145), of which a great part went to Britain. Therefore, British banks argued for increased cotton exports to buttress Egypt's ability to repay her debts. The state itself, seeking to maximise revenue, increase export duties and especially to enlarge profits from selling of government land, depended upon improved irrigation. An important contemporary expression of this 'water awareness' in Britain was marked by *The Times* (see, for example, *The Times* for the years 1893 and 1894) reporting regularly on the water discharges of the Nile!

Only the state was capable of implementing the large hydraulic works that were required, and only the government could distribute the water according to what was necessarily a highly centralized and very complex plan. In years of low level the distribution of water required an especially strong hand to govern it. In times of high floods the battle to contain its damages had to be led by the government — between 1883 and 1888 the Egyptian government levied, for example, one hundred thousand corviable persons annually to watch and fight the flood. When the system failed, the government was rightly blamed. Expansion of summer cultivation continued to be the responsibility of the government. As cultivation improved and expanded, the damage done by a mismanaged water system would be 'proportionally greater' (Garstin 1894: 11). While the embankments under the basin irrigation system could be built by local peasants, the barrages and great reser-

voirs of perennial irrigation required technology and money that only the Government could furnish. And while the rulers of ancient Egypt could escape criticism by blaming the problems on the tears shed by Isis over the tomb of Osiris, Cromer could only rely on the scientific capabilities of his hydraulic engineers.

The British had therefore barely planted their flag on the shores of the Nile before they were met by demands to implement large hydraulic enterprises (Scott-Moncrieff 1895:414—415). Already in 1880, Count de la Motte, a Frenchman, had taken up the question of reservoirs and proposed a dam at 'Gebel Silsila'. In 1882, an American, Mr. Cope Whithouse, suggested utilizing *Wadi Rayan* (see *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, 1882, no. 2), a depression in the desert also mentioned by Linant Pasha (Bellefonds 1873). During the 1880s and 1890s, a number of projects were discussed and dam sites examined.¹ Garstin wrote that the literature on one of these projects alone, the *Wady Rayan*, was 'so extensive indeed (...) that the name of *Wadi Rayan* ought to be as well known to the world as that of the lake of Geneva' (Garstin 1894:30). The British rulers faced rising expectations about the potentials of water control. Naturally they were looking to the water engineers as the troubleshooters.

The hydrological character of the

Nile lent itself to human control. The volume of discharge of the river varied enormously from one year to another. In 1878—79 total discharge was 150 billion m³. In years of minimal flow it might be under 50 billion³. The average exceeded 80 billion m³. Fluctuations were even more marked from season to season. 80 per cent of the water flowed down in the three months between August and October, in the remaining nine months only 20 per cent. This meant that in a normal year most of the water flowed unused into the Mediterranean. At the same time the gap between water demand and supply increased in the all-important summer season.

With a growing water demand on the one hand, and a river far from being harnessed on the other hand, any administration in Egypt in the late 19th century would have been obliged to make increased water control a top priority: How to increase the Nile yield in the 'timely season'? How to protect the agricultural lands against devastating floods? How to dam the excess water in September, October and November for utilisation in the season of scarcity? How to construct dams which could reduce the differences in the yearly discharge fluctuations? To narrow the gap between accessibility and demand for water was therefore a permanent worry to the British. The complexities of this task increased as perennial irrigation spread.

II

Cromer's administration gave much weight to the planning and development of the irrigation sector from day one. Experienced water planners were brought from India in 1883, the same year Cromer took up service in Egypt.

Their department was given an exceptional degree of autonomy and was deliberately shielded from intervention by other European interests in Cairo. Departing from his generally stringent financial policy, Cromer took up huge

loans for irrigation works in 1884. In 1894 he stated that he 'never felt more confident in recommending an outlay of capital in order to realize a prospective profit'.² One of Cromer's financial advisers, Alfred Milner, characterized the results of these investments as 'one of the most marvellous chapters even in the romantic history of Egyptian finance' (Milner 1892: 228). Cromer later wrote that these expenses 'contributed probably more than any one cause to the comparative prosperity' of Egypt (Cromer 1908, II:464), it ensured no less than 'the solvency of the Egyptian Treasury' (ibid.). According to Cromer, irrigation works were not only a permanent priority, but also a policy which continuously proved its success.³ From 1890, therefore, every Annual Report enclosed a Memorandum on irrigation activities. The prevailing British view in Egypt was in 1892 described as follows: 'The best thing the Financial Ministry can do is to place as much money as it can afford at their disposal (British water planners, my comment), confident that whatever is thus spent will bring in a splendid return' (Milner 1892:310).

The character of Egypt's ecosystem and the existing standard of the irrigation sector gave the water engineers a pivotal role, especially so in the 1890s. Summing up his rule in Egypt, Cromer put them on an equal footing with the army. While the soldiers held the Egyptians down by force, the water planners conquered their minds or, as his financial adviser put it in 1892, the

British engineer secured the support of Egyptian public opinion (ibid.). They 'justified Western methods to Eastern minds', Cromer later wrote (Cromer 1908, II:465). Already in 1886 he claimed that increased water supplies would entail that 'the good results of European administration can readily be brought home to the natives' (quoted in Marquis of Zetland 1932: 171). Two years later he wrote that British success in Egypt depended on development of the irrigation structure and increased access to summer water, and some months before the Fashoda crisis, he wrote to Salisbury: 'There can be no doubt that the most crying want of the country at present is an increase in the water supply'.⁴

The first decades of British rule were nostalgically termed the 'Cromer-Garstin regime' by a British leader of Sudanese irrigation in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵ The bosses of Egyptian irrigation in the 1890s — especially Scott-Moncrieff and Garstin, but also Ross and Willcocks — had considerable political influence because of their crucial role. They were also responsible for Egyptian agriculture. Their reports were in several instances virtually copied by Cromer in his Despatches to London.

In spite of all this, the strategy of Cromer and his water planners for improved and increased human control of the Nile River system has been neglected in the literature, and Robinson and Gallagher do not discuss the issue at all.

III

Egypt where the available natural supply has been completely exhausted, and there still remains more land to grow cotton' (Ross 1893: 188). In the

1880s the priority had been repair of the canals and the dams which had fallen into disrepair.⁶ The most important project in this period was the restoration of the Delta dam, completed in first half of 1890. A series of important though smaller projects had been completed, like remodelling the Upper Egypt basin and starting operations at the Mex Pumping Station. Altogether these works contributed to the doubling of cotton production from 1888 to 1892 (Crouchely 1938:148). As long as this was the priority of the water planners, and the government at the same time had grave financial difficulties, there was no need to look upstream for improved Nile control. In the early 1890s, however, the upper limit for expansion had been reached with existing damming technology. The yearly and seasonal discharge fluctuations demonstrated, moreover, that the existing water control system could not always satisfy actual demand. In 1888, for instance, about 250,000 acres in Upper Egypt received no irrigation water (Willcocks 1894:5). That had enormous economic as well as political consequences, and the irrigation officers reported to Cromer early the same year that the spirit of resistance was 'stronger now than ever' (quoted in Robinson and Gallagher 1981: 277). In other years uncontrolled flood caused irreparable damage. There was a permanent fear that the disastrous Nile year in 1878–79 might repeat itself.

To solve that fundamental problem of natural supply which Ross outlined, water works of an altogether new type and technology were required. During the 1890s, therefore, it became increasingly evident that the seasonal fluctuations of the Nile had to be controlled and evened out. The proposals of de la Motte and Whithouse acquired new actuality; Willcocks produced a prelimi-

nary *Report on Reservoirs* in 1891, Ross a *Note on Reservoirs* the same year. Scott-Moncrieff, the Under-Secretary, decided then that a detailed study of reservoir sites should be given top priority. Garstin reformulated the problem Ross pointed to in economic terms: The government had to make up its mind; either 'to stop the sales of land (which was a main income for the state, my comment) or to take steps for increasing the water supply in summer'.⁷ Cromer stated his priorities again and again. In 1893 he telegraphed Rosebery, supporting a circular which had been 'addressed to the Powers by the Government of His Majesty the Khedive, requesting that the economies effected by the conversion of the Debt should be applied to the constructing of reservoirs in Upper Egypt'.⁸

In 1894, the *Report on Perennial Irrigation and Flood Protection of Egypt* was published by the Government, after it had been secretly circulated in 1893. It estimated the future annual need for summer water at 3.610 billion m³ (Willcocks 1894:9). It asserted that if irrigation were introduced in Upper Egypt, where agriculture still depended on the basin system, and improved in Lower Egypt, the annual income would rise from 32,315,000 Egyptian pounds to 38,540,000 pounds.⁹ The overshadowing political and administrative questions therefore became: How to secure over 3.5 billion m³ of irrigation water in the summer season, creating an estimated net gain of 6,225,000 pounds to the country per year? And how to ensure the country against floods?

The most concrete suggestion of the 1894 report was to build that reservoir which had been discussed by the government for many years, at Aswan in Upper Egypt. This reservoir was, however, seen as a temporary solution

J. C. P. Ross, former Inspector-General of the Egyptian Irrigation Service, wrote in 1893: 'We have now arrived at a stage in the summer irrigation of

only, because the planned capacity satisfied only half of Egypt's estimated needs. The Council of Ministers discussed, for example, in a meeting of 3rd June 1894, possible dam-sites in the Sudan.¹⁰ In this meeting Garstin opposed a plan of such a reservoir proposed by Sir John Fowler on technical grounds: 'no detailed survey of the river above the second cataract has as yet been made' (ibid.). But no one seems to have written off the idea *because* the dam was situated in *another* country. The aim was clear. Cromer wrote the same year: It may 'at some future time, (...) perhaps be supplemented by another dam south of Wady Halfa'.¹¹ And Garstin underlined in his annual report (1894) that the 'construction of a second ...(dam)... to the south will be merely a question of time'.¹² In the 1894 report he wrote that 'we may confidently predict' that the dam will be 'only one of a chain which will eventually extend from the First Cataract to the junction of the White and Blue Niles' (Garstin 1894:53). Willcocks stated that the 'infinitely better and more reliable' flood protection for Egypt was to 'control the Nile before it enters Egypt' (Willcocks 1894:45).

The planned storing capacity of the Aswan Dam, 2.550 billion m³ of water, was decided by technical and ecological constraints. The dam was provided with numerous and very large under-sluices which would pass the entire flood waters, due to flood waters deposit, which, according to the report, would have reduced the capacity by 55 million m³ yearly. However, already in autumn 1894, just after the plan was published, unexpected political problems arose.¹³ Leading archaeologists in France and Great Britain united in demanding a lower water level than planned in order to save the pharaonic temple at Philæ from inundation

(Scott-Moncrieff 1895:417). This opposition was so strong that it forced the government in Cairo to yield and to amend its 1894 plan. The capacity was therefore, according to Garstin, reduced by more than fifty per cent, to 1.065 billion m³.¹⁴ The reservoir could therefore meet only 25 per cent of Egypt's future needs.¹⁵ Winston Churchill captured the mood among British administrators in Cairo at that time when he wrote: 'The state must struggle and the people starve in order that professors may exult and tourists find some place to scratch their names' (quoted in Sandes 1937:383).

According to Garstin the reduction implied that 2.610 billion m³ had to be supplied from elsewhere (Garstin 1901:48). This 'elsewhere' could not be along the Nile in Egypt, first and foremost because of the silt which the Blue Nile carried with it from Ethiopia. This also excluded 'any hope of constructing solid dams of the ordinary type in the valley of the Nile downstream of the Atbara junction' (Willcocks 1894:12). The problem, it was thought, could only be solved upstream, and it made the question of occupying the Sudan a more pressing issue.

However, even a more modest dam at Aswan itself could not be rationally operated without better and more exact knowledge of the Nile upstream in the Sudan. Without information on the river fluctuations before it reached the reservoir, it would be virtually impossible to make the necessary estimations required for its management. In 1894, Willcocks showed that the times between Khartoum and Aswan are only '10 days in flood and between Aswan and Cairo only five days'. Obviously, proper management of the reservoir therefore required a number of gauging stations along the Nile and its tributaries in the Sudan, as well as the

re-establishment of a working Nilometer in Khartoum at the junction of the Blue and White Niles. Already in 1882, before the era of reservoirs, Major Mason-Bey had shown the necessity for establishing more Nilometers at both the main Nile and its tributaries in the Sudan for planning purposes in Egypt (Mason-Bey 1881:51–56). In May 1893 the Société Khédiviale de Géographie discussed in detail information on water discharges collected

by the gauging-stations in the Sudan, established on the order of Ismail, from the time 'when the Sudan was not closed' (see Ventre-Bey 1894). The need for more hydrological information was felt so pressing that immediately after the British annexation of the Lake Victoria area in 1894, Cairo asked the government there, through the 'English Foreign Office' in London, to erect and read a gauge on Lake Victoria (Willcocks 1894:12).

IV

Several years before the Sudan Campaign started, and five years before Wingate and Kitchener sailed on 'Dal' towards Fashoda, Scott-Moncrieff, Ross, Willcocks and Garstin were discussing the necessity of controlling the Nile upstream. Both Scott-Moncrieff and Garstin were members of the Bureau de L'Institut Egyptien¹⁶, which had many meetings on precisely this issue from 1891 to 1894. A central idea in the government report of 1894 was that the hydrological features of the Nile and the future increase in summer water demand would require the regulation of the Nile south of the Egyptian borders, at Lake Albert and Lake Victoria. Willcocks wrote that what 'the Italian Lakes are to the plains of Lombardy, Lake Albert is to the land of Egypt' (Willcocks 1894, Appendix III:11). By damming the lake(s), 'a constant and plentiful supply of water to the Nile valley during the summer months' could be ensured (ibid.). 'There alone', he wrote, 'we deal with quantities of water which approach' the demand (ibid.:10). The previous year Ross had speculated along similar lines. He envisaged that by raising the water level of Lake Victoria by only one metre one would get a water flow in the

Nile which was '30 times more than wanted' (Ross 1893:189). These plans would be impossible to implement or even properly plan as long as the Sudan was still under the rule of the Mahdists. Moreover, no administration in Cairo would ever consider regulating Lake Victoria, a lake roughly the size of Scotland, without improving the White Nile's water transport capacity in the Southern Sudan.

The 1894 report pointed out that the White Nile was the tributary contributing most to the total water flow of the Nile during the summer season when cotton was grown.¹⁷ The waters of the White Nile were described 'as valuable as gold' (Willcocks 1894, Appendix III:11). Garstin and Willcocks knew that *sadd* was blocking the river¹⁸, and that the White Nile lost huge amounts of waters on its way through the swamps in the Southern Sudan.¹⁹ The report by Garstin from 1899 was produced only six months after the Fashoda crisis and before any new knowledge concerning the Nile had been collected and analysed. Nonetheless, it suggested remodelling the river and clearing it of *sadd* in order to drain the entire swamp region. According to Garstin the Nile would then double its

summer water flow. Furthermore, Garstin proposed draining the swamp so as to provide a flood escape for flood-waters which might represent a threat to Egypt (Garstin 1899:31).

When Garstin in the 1899 report declared that it was impossible to advance scientific study of the Nile unless the river was cleared of *sadd*, he was repeating common knowledge. Already General Gordon had pointed to the problem of *sadd* in any expansionist policy in the Nile valley. He had strongly urged the Khedive to take possession of the East Africa coast, as the gateway to Uganda, because the Bahr al-Jabal tended to be impassable. Attempts that had been made, by among others Samuel Baker and Romelo Gessi under the Turkish-Egyptian regime, to clear the river, had demonstrated that the *sadd* had to be removed from the north, i.e. against the current, and that the work demanded a great deal of time, money and labour. The British realized, of course, that a hostile Mahdist regime would put a stop to any plan for carrying out a task of such dimensions.²⁰

Until 1885, Egypt had daily received information by telegraph from the Nilometer at Khartoum,²¹ and in 1875 a station was erected close to Dakla village in order to measure the Atbara (Chelu 1891: 35). The 'fall of Gordon' was dramatic and caught the attention of the day (and of historians later on), but the loss of the Nilometer at Khartoum represented a more direct threat to Egypt, because it jeopardized the optimal management of the irrigation system.²² But what the water planners in Cairo considered a great loss already in 1885, had far greater consequences in the mid-1890s because of the growing water gap, the vulnerability of the new crop rotation system and because of the more exact hydro-

logical information required for the planned big reservoirs. Willcocks wrote in 1893: 'As Egypt possesses no barometric, thermometric, or rain gauge stations in the valley of the Nile, we are always ignorant of the coming flood.'²³

The British hydrologists and engineers in the 1890s did not have any in-depth knowledge of the Nile's upper reaches. Those 'in charge' of the life artery of Egypt, had no first hand knowledge of the river in the Sudan. Ross wrote that 'unfortunately the Dervishes prevent any scientific examination' of the Nile upstream (Ross 1893: 191). Scott-Moncrieff complained, while speaking in Britain in 1895 that he, like his audience, had to consult 'the works of Speke, Baker, Stanley and our other great explorers' for information regarding anything higher up than Philæ, and said that 'if a foreigner were to lecture to his countrymen about the river Thames, and were to begin by informing them that he had never been above Greenwich, he might be looked upon as an imposter' (Scott-Moncrieff 1895: 405). In this context it is possible to understand why Cromer in 1896 could triumphantly inform Salisbury that due to the establishment of Nile gauges in the Sudan after the occupation of Dongola, 'considerably earlier information was obtained this year of the river than has been possible in recent times', and, he said, this was a fact which 'cannot be overrated'.²⁴ The most central British water planner in Egypt, William Garstin, described these years, when it came to hydrological studies, as if 'the thick veil had settled down on the Upper Nile'.²⁵

The water planners attempted to gather all available information on the Nile in the Sudan. Regarding the mean flow discharges of the White and Blue Niles at Khartoum, Willcocks mentioned only one source in 1889, Linant

Pasha (Willcocks 1889:7). Five years later he cited among others Baker, Chelu, Lombardini and Mason-Bey. The references in their reports show that they knew the records of the Nilometers in the Sudan from before the Mahdist revolution. In addition they had discussions with people like Samuel Baker, the British explorer and Ismail's governor in the Upper Nile area.²⁶ So although their knowledge was deficient according to present-day hydrological science, both the 1894 report, Garstin's annual reports and the discussions in the Khedivial Society show that they regarded their knowledge as sufficient to speculate and plan for waterworks upstream.

The task of bringing the entire Nile under human control inspired in itself the thought of one rule encompassing the whole valley and that should be British. The discovery of the sources of the Nile had brought fame to their

countrymen Speke, Grant and Baker. Now Garstin, Scott-Moncrieff and Willcocks could 'take the river in hand'.²⁷ Willcocks in 1894 likened directly their plans for the Nile as a worthy follow-up of these British discoveries. Garstin later wrote that if they succeeded in taming the Nile, such an accomplishment could be compared with the building of the pyramids (Garstin 1904: 166). What was conceived as the main obstacle, and an obstacle which should and could be overcome, was neither technological nor economic constraints, but the fact that the Nile was as yet only partly under British rule. In 1895 Scott-Moncrieff summed up the 'Nile vision' of the water planners when he said:

Is it not evident, then, that the Nile from the Victoria Nyanza to the Mediterranean should be under one rule? (Scott-Moncrieff 1895: 418).

V

As an echo of Scott-Moncrieff, Cromer wrote in *Modern Egypt* that a central motive behind the occupation of the Sudan was 'the effective control of the waters of the Nile from the Equatorial Lakes to the sea' (Cromer 1908, II:110). The book otherwise confirms that by the word 'control', he not only understood the absence of European rivals from the shores of the Nile, but efficient harnessing of its waters by the British in Cairo. Full of confidence he wrote:

When, eventually, the waters of the Nile, from the Lakes to the sea, are brought fully under control, it will be possible to boast that Man, in this case the Englishman, has turned the

gifts of Nature to the best possible advantage. (ibid.:461).

Undoubtedly, Cromer regarded the irrigation question as being of fundamental importance to Egypt's development. He supported the 1894 report, and not only did he actively back the plan for the Aswan Dam but he was the one who secured its implementation. And no sooner had the British moved into the Sudan than he sent — in his own view — his most important official in Egypt on an expedition up the Nile. Already in April 1897, Garstin had submitted his report on the Nile cataracts.²⁸ In the wake of Kitchener's flotilla, Garstin studied the White Nile in 1899, the White Nile, Bahr al-Jabal,

Bahr al-Zaraf and Bahr al-Ghazal in 1901, and again, in 1904. In 1903 he was in Uganda, along the Semliki River, at Lake Albert and again at Bahr al-Jabal (Gleichen 1905, I:280). When Garstin in 1899 proposed to remove the *sadd* in the Bahr al-Jabal which blocked the river's flow, he received immediate financial support from Cromer. Cromer's argument was:

The question of increasing the summer supply of the Nile is, however, of such a vital interest to Egypt, that the present expenditure is fully justified. (Cromer 1900).

In the introduction to Garstin's report from 1904, Cromer gave priority to the plans on the Upper Nile. Cromer suggested that 5.5 million pounds should be allocated for the proposed regulation works in the swamps.²⁹ The cost of the recommended investments is most clearly illustrated when compared to the total cost of the Sudan campaigns from 1896 to 1898, i.e. 2,345,345 pounds (Peel 1904:263), and compared to the total revenues of the

Sudan budget in the years 1899–1903, i.e. 1,132,000 pounds (Cromer 1904:19). Cromer did not, of course, intend to use this money, a sum which surpassed any investment the British had previously made in the Nile Valley, for scraping the 'bottom of the barrel'.

Cromer did not regard the Southern Sudan as being completely worthless, as claimed by Robinson & Gallagher and others. Of course, Cromer was no romantic builder of empire, so control of the territory of the Southern Sudan was not a goal in itself. It was a means to an end. To Cromer, the Sudan and the Upper Nile region were important because of their waters, which, if tamed and regulated, could yield great economic and political returns to Egypt. Cromer saw clearly that it was not sufficient for the British just to keep out European rivals; they had to take control of the shores of the Nile upstream, not only for pre-emptive, military strategic purposes, but for the realization of expansive, economic objectives. The so-called 'reoccupation' was thought inevitable, what was discussed was when and how.

VI

By focusing on the relationship between the hydrology of the Nile on the one hand, and the character and barriers of Egypt's irrigation economy in the 1890s on the other, I have suggested a new perspective for an analysis of British colonial policy in the Nile Valley. This perspective shifts the focus from the diplomatic circles in the European capitals towards the Man on the Spot — Cromer and his water planners — and especially the *spot itself* and its most significant geographical economic and political determinating factor: the Nile.

Egypt's geopolitical situation, by Churchill once compared to a 'deep-sea diver whose air was provided by the long and vulnerable tube of the Nile', caused, of course, concern among the British in Cairo when other European powers threatened to acquire a foothold in the Nile Valley. The British did not, however, fear that the French should dam the Nile at Fashoda, as Robinson & Gallagher assert, because they knew that such a project was not feasible from an hydrological point of view. The British in the 1890s were aware that Fashoda was perhaps the

least suitable place anywhere on the Nile for such an undertaking.

Robinson and Gallagher's one-factor explanation makes European rivalry a necessary and sufficient precondition for British expansion in the Nile Valley. I have argued that the growing water crisis in Egypt in the 1890s made the destiny of the Upper Nile subject to the political and economic development of the irrigation economy under British leadership. Whereas Robinson and Gallagher claimed that it was the *frontiers of fear* which motivated the British march to Fashoda, this article focus on another impetus — the *limits of irrigation water* in Egypt. They said that 'Fashoda was simply the climax to an old policy of imperial defense' (Robinson and Gallagher 1981:378), and they described the British perception of the Southern Sudan as being a worthless region, compared to a '*bottom of the barrel*'. I argue that the Southern Sudan was regarded as the very opposite — a *barrel filled with water* — because the region possessed something which, to the British-controlled irrigation economy in Egypt, was more valuable than gold. The Sudan was not a buffer state like Afghanistan, but

directly linked, via the Nile, to the development prospects of agriculture, cotton export and stability in Egypt. This analysis of the Cromer-Garstin regime disagrees with the general description of the British policy-makers as being influenced by 'defensive psychology', that 'the defensive psychology which kept watch over northern India had been transformed into Africa' (ibid. 288). Their plans for 'taking the Nile in hand' was, on the contrary, grounded in a feeling of strength and confidence. Robinson and Gallagher's theory is held to 'suggest the kind of defensive imperialism that extends beyond the areas of expanding economy but acts for their strategic protection' (ibid. 474–75). The present analysis suggests that the British Upper Nile policy was a kind of imperialism that expanded beyond the areas of expanding economy, but acted for Egypt's continued agricultural and economic development. It also aimed at creating stability at the Suez Canal and prosperity for the British cotton industry. Nile hydrology and Nile valley geology made the British occupation of the Upper Nile valley a rational expansionist, imperial policy.

Notes

1. See different articles discussing different proposals in, for example, *Bulletin de l'Institut Egyptien*, Troisième Serie, No. 2, année 1891:36–83, Cairo 1892, *Bulletin de l'Institut Egyptien*, Troisième Serie, No. 5, année 1894:416–433, Cairo 1895, *Bulletin de la Société Khédiviale de Géographie*, IVe Serie, No. 1, Janvier 1894:9–43, *Bulletin de la Société Khédiviale de Géographie*, IVe Serie, No. 10, Décembre 1896:745–765.

2. Cromer to the Earl of Kimberley, 27.7.1894, (Conf.), in FO/407/127, Public Records Office, London. Cromer wrote a number of letters and papers which dealt

with the water issue. Based on a careful reading of these papers, there can be no doubt that he regarded improved water control as a main part of his overall economic recovery strategy for Egypt.

3. See Chapter LIV on 'Irrigation' in *Modern Egypt*, II, pp. 456–465.

4. Cromer to Salisbury, February 27, 1898, Annual report, FO 407/146.

5. R. M. MacGregor, 'The Upper Nile Irrigation Projects', 3, 10.12.1945, *Allan Private Papers* 589/14/48, Sudan Archives, Durham.

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6. See, for example, Scott-Moncrieff 1895 and Willcocks and Craig 1913.
7. W. Garstin, Note on the Public Works Department for the year 1894, 19.2.1895, Enclosure 3 in No. 51, FO 407/131.
8. Cromer to Rosebery, 27.12.1893, Further correspondence respecting the finances of Egypt 1893, FO/407/124. Rosebery answered immediately and supported Cromer's strategy.
9. Willcocks 1894:5. The direct gain to the state was said to be from sale of reclaimed lands and the increase of the annual revenue derived from them. Indirect gain to the state, but direct gain to the country resulted from increased value of agricultural produce, the rise in the price of land and in the land rents, increase in custom revenue etc.
10. Note upon the proposed modifications of the Assuan Dam Project, by W. Garstin, 14.11. 1894, Enclosure in No. 166, FO 407/126.
11. Cromer to the Earl of Kimberley 15.11. 1894, in Further correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, January to June 1894, FO/407/126.
12. W. Garstin, Note on the Public Works Department for the year 1894, 19.2.1895, Enclosure 3 in No. 51, FO/407/131.
13. See, for example, Mr. Rodd to the Earl of Kimberley 3.8.1894, referring to the protest of the London Society of Antiquarians against the proposed Nile reservoir. In Further correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, FO/407/127.
14. Memorandum by Sir William Garstin, Enclosure 1 in No. 30, FO/407/144.
15. W. Garstin, 'Note upon the Egyptian Water Supply', 3, *Despatch from the Earl of Cromer respecting the Water Supply of Egypt*, Egypt No. 2 (London 1907).
16. Garstin succeeded Scott-Moncrieff as member 30th December 1892.
17. Willcocks 1894, Appendix III, 8. He quotes (Appendix III, 4) among others Linnant Pasha's estimates suggesting that the White Nile carried twice as much water as the Blue Nile during the crucial summer season.
18. For a detailed description of the composition and role of *sadd*, see Rzoska 1976.
19. E. Lombardini published *Saggio idrologico sur Nilo* (1864) and A. Chelu gave out *Le Nil, Le Soudan, Egypte* (1891). See also Willcocks, 1894, Appendix III, 10–11. Mason-Bey 1881 discussed how a removal of the *sadd* could increase the water flow to Egypt.
20. In 1889 and 1900 the British sent out an expedition of 2,000 people who spent half a year clearing the river.
21. For a description of the role of water-measuring stations in the Sudan for rational water planning in Egypt before 1885, see Chelu 1891: 2–38.
22. See, for example, Milner's description in Milner 1892:197–198.
23. See W. Willcocks, 'Report on the Nile and Proposed Reservoirs', 17, *Cairint* 3/14/232, National Records Office, Khartoum.
24. Cromer to Salisbury 15.1.1897, Annual Report for 1896, FO/407/142.
25. Garstin 1909: 135. The leading Nile expert in this century, H. E. Hurst, summarized more than a generation later what the water planners in the 1890s understood; that the occupation of the Sudan was 'the great landmark' in recent research on the Nile. (Hurst 1927: 40.)
26. Willcocks especially thanks Samuel Baker, see Willcocks 1894, Appendix III:3.
27. Scott-Moncrieff's expression, in Scott-Moncrieff 1895: 410.
28. Report by Mr. Garstin on the Province of Dongola, Enclosure in No. 12, Further correspondence respecting the affairs of Egypt, April to June 1897, FO/407/143.
29. Cromer's 'Letter of introduction', iii, in Garstin 1904.
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Summary

Terje Tvedt, 'The Race to Fashoda: Robinson and Gallagher Revisited', *Forum for Development Studies*, No. 2, 1992, pp. 195–210.

This article shows that the British in the 1890s had expansionist motives in the Upper Nile valley. The British strategists saw a need for increasing the amount of available Nile waters in Egypt for cotton production. A sound and efficient irrigation management, which could secure both stability at the Suez Canal, improved Egyptian finances and more cotton to Lancashire, required British occupation of the Sudan. The dominating theory links the British occupation to the question of European rivalry only, i.e., that it was the French march to-

wards Fashoda in the late 1890s which 'forced' the British, out of fear and a feeling of weakness, to occupy the Upper Nile. The present article, which is based on previously unused source materials and new interpretations of much used documents, contradicts this one-factor theory. Due to the importance of the Sudan question in literature and theories of the European partition of Africa, the present article has, therefore, immediate relevance for this broader question of imperial motives and causes.

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Islam and Democracy

The last three decades have seen a formidable Islamic revival. Even though this movement is varied and ranges from soft-spoken religious criticism of society's moral ills to militant and violent attempts to overthrow what is seen as an ungodly and corrupt order, it has become a mass movement in the whole Islamic world. The question therefore arises: are Islam and democracy compatible?

The states that are part of the Islamic world are Third World countries, and few of them have any democratic record at all. However, with the failure and collapse of Soviet style socialism (= state capitalism without political freedom), democratic institutions have become respectable and even desired in most parts of the world. Several Islamic countries have started political reforms in a democratic direction. Relatively free elections have been held in many of these countries during the last few years, e.g. Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Algeria, and Indonesia. In many cases, but not all, Islamic parties and candidates have done well — in Algeria to such a degree that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was about to ensure a comfortable majority in the parliamentary elections earlier this year.

With this kind of democratic reform process taking place, combined with the

success of Islamic parties and groups, the question of Islam and democracy is no longer a theoretical one. My approach in this article will, however, primarily be theoretical. This article will mainly be a conceptual analysis, which is important since it is the concepts which, when used in a proper way, give us a grasp of reality. In short, we may say that concepts represent realities. The realities are complex, and conceptual clarification is a necessary precondition for an understanding of whether Islam and democracy are compatible. But concepts and language may on the other hand be misused as power tools for control and oppression. This becomes very clear as soon as we attempt to define Islam.

In this article I will, after attempting to give fairly comprehensive definitions of Islam, discuss democracy and its relationship to the process of modernisation. I will then, in an attempt to apply and give content to the definitions, present elements from the history of Islam, both as a theological-philosophical system and a culture and civilisation, that might be of relevance in a discussion of Islam and democracy. But it will also be necessary to take a brief look at Western influence as an exogenous factor in the process of modernisation and democratisation in Islamic countries.