Introduction

We have entered the twenty-first century still divided by a way of thinking inherited from the nineteenth. Nineteenth-century Europe learned to understand the modern world as the outcome of history. People came to believe that the pattern of human affairs manifested neither the working of a divine will nor the self-regulating balance of a natural system, but the unfolding of an inner secular force. There were several ways of accounting for this inner dynamic, all of them referring to the increasing power of human reason to order social affairs. The movement of history could be ascribed to the growing technical control that reason acquired over the natural and social world, to the power of reason to expand the scope of human freedom, or to the economic forms that were said to flow from the spread of rational calculation and freedom—the exchange relations of modern capitalism. Whichever aspect of modern, secular rationality one emphasized, everything could be understood as the development of this universal principle of reason, or a reaction against it, or its failure, delay, or absence.

In the twentieth century, as the study of society became a university profession and was divided into the separate disciplines of social science, each field inherited the assumption that a singular logic provided the unseen dynamic of social life. Different disciplines took different approaches to deciphering this logic. Some, like economics, depicted the rationality of social life in ideal form, proposing to understand particular cases in terms of their degree of deviation from this unreal abstraction. Others revealed the logic of modernity in large patterns of social and political change. In some fields, especially in the later decades of the twentieth century, there were also attempts to show the limits of this logic. Social historians, cultural anthropologists, and scholars in new fields like area studies, gender
studies, and cultural studies looked at the weight of resistance to the spread of rationalization, the market, and what came to be called globalization. They showed the complexity of local variation in the patterns of modernity, the mixtures of the modern with the nonmodern, even the survival or revival of alternatives. Yet in attempting to uncover the complexities and limits of modernity’s singular logic, these critiques for the most part continued to assume such a logic was at work. Despite the richness of the new work, this common assumption left us heading into the twenty-first century as captives of nineteenth-century thought.

The critiques that were made of the more systematic and nomothetic kinds of social science took two common forms. The first was to reveal how things that orthodox inquiries took for granted were inventions. Categories that nineteenth-century social science had grounded in the material, racial, biological, or psychological nature of human societies—class, race, nation, gender, modernity, the West, and many more—were shown to be “socially constructed.” The second was to show how the categories’ artificial nature and the subterfuges involved in their invention made these constructs less universal, stable, pure, singular, and transparent than was usually assumed. In some cases even the underlying idea of historical time, as the homogeneous chronometric within which human social action is contained, was placed in question. These achievements defined the fields variously called interpretive social science, cultural studies, or, in a loose sense, poststructuralism. Such fields, with all their differences, seemed to be marked by their common distance from the systematizing social sciences, both those operating at the individualist level of hypothetico-deductive methods, and those at the structural level of historical systems and processes.

Yet this distance itself became a problem. It left the older kinds of social science untroubled. It did so by failing to contest the territory on which they were established. Focusing on the process by which social objects are imagined or discursively constructed made the work of imagination into its own sphere. Demonstrating that everything social is cultural left aside the existence of other spheres, the remainder or excess that the work of social construction works upon—the real, the natural, the nonhuman. Insisting on the centrality of the cultural tacitly recognized those other dimensions—the material, the economic—in relation to which the cultural gains its distinctiveness. Attending to the significance of the local acknowledged the weight of the global, in reference to which the local is experienced and defined. Recovering the importance of particular alternatives, mixtures, and variations acknowledged the force of the universal, to which such variation always refers.
Although the more cultural or critical approaches to social understanding might object to the methods, assumptions, generalizations, or limits of those social sciences that claimed the rigor of a hypothetico-deductive logic or the inclusiveness of a systemic analysis, they had already granted the existence of the terrain that those methods defined as their own. By admitting the existence of a universal process (modernity, capitalism, globalization) and of forces that, when all is said and done, underlie it (the forces of nature, the material, the technological, the economic), these ways of thinking again and again handed over to the systematizing forms of social science a territory and a logic they would never so easily have been able to establish. It is that territory and that logic that this book contests.

It is a curious fact that while critical theory has interrogated almost every leading category of modern social science, it has left perhaps the most central one untouched. It has critiqued the concepts of class, nation, culture, society, state, gender, race, personhood, and many others, but not the idea of the economy. It is as though the varieties of cultural theory had to leave in place a residual sphere of the economic, as a reserve whose existence in the distance made cultural analysis secure. Everything else could be understood as cultural, including particular forms of economic practice or local ways of thinking about the economy. Anthropological studies of communities that do not know the modern concept of the economy could show that nonmarket societies had other ways of understanding value and organizing exchange. But even these emerged as an alternative kind of economy, rather than as ways of questioning the foundation of the concept. Indeed, the classic work of Malinowski helped, if anything, to universalize the idea of the economy when taken up by later scholars. The economy always remained, tacitly, as a material ground out of which the cultural is shaped, or in relation to which it acquires its significance.

Even when the modern concept of the economy has been studied, its surprising history has been missed. From the work of Karl Polanyi in 1944 to some of the last writings of Michel Foucault, published in English in 1991, there have been several accounts of the emergence of the economy as a sphere of government or self-regulation in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Polanyi understood its emergence as the separation of market relations from the wider social networks in which they were previously embedded and constrained. During the modern period, he argued, the economy was disembedded from society. Foucault relates the formation of the economy to the birth of “government” in the eighteenth century, a term that in those days referred not to the institutions of the modern state but to the methods of enumerating, regulating, and managing
a population, out of which the modern state and modern social sciences were gradually formed. The practices of government, in this view, formed the economy as a field of political regulation.

These and other studies overlook an unexpected fact. No political economist of the eighteenth or nineteenth century wrote about an object called “the economy.” The term “economy” in that period carried the older meaning of “thrift,” and in a larger sense referred to the proper husbanding of resources and the intelligent management of their circulation. The classical political economists expanded its meaning to refer to this proper management at the level of the political order. They used it in ways similar to the term “government,” in the sense that Foucault explores. “Political economy” was concerned not with the politics of an economy, but with the proper economy, or governing, of a polity.

The idea of the economy in its contemporary sense did not emerge until the middle decades of the twentieth century. Between the 1930s and 1950s, economists, sociologists, national statistical agencies, international and corporate organizations, and government programs formulated the concept of the economy, meaning the totality of monetarized exchanges within a defined space. The economy came into being as a self-contained, internally dynamic, and statistically measurable sphere of social action, scientific analysis, and political regulation.

Was the economy, then, one more “social construction,” a recent product of the collective imagination to place alongside the ideas of culture, society, class, or the nation? Or was it, as most would probably argue, just a new and more coherent name for economic processes that already existed? After all, since the formation of professional economics fifty years earlier, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, a body of scholars had been constructing models and descriptions of the mechanism of market exchange, treating the mechanism as a self-contained and self-regulating process. Moreover, they traced their ideas back to the work of François Quesnay or Adam Smith, a century or more before, if not to earlier studies of “political arithmetick” or the writings of Aristotle.

The answer I propose here is that it was neither. It is not adequate to describe the economy as a social construction, or an invention of the social imagination, for such an approach always implies that the object in question is a representation, a set of meanings, a particular way of seeing the world. This kind of analysis leaves the world itself intact. Intentionally or not, it depends upon maintaining the absolute difference between representations and the world they represent, social constructions and the reality they construct. It is an analysis that leaves the economists to carry on
undisturbed, pointing out that they are not concerned with the history of representations, but with the underlying reality their models represent.

Should we agree, then, that at some level the “economy” was just a new word—or even a new way of imagining—something that always existed? That will not do either. The birth of the economy did not occur only at what is called the level of language or the social imagination. Its arrival can indeed be traced in the writings of economists such as John Maynard Keynes; in the organization of a new branch of the discipline, macroeconomics, in relation to which most earlier economic theory was repositioned as “micro”; in the development of the field known as econometrics, which attempted the mathematical modeling of the entirety of a nation’s economic system, and of the techniques known as national income accounting, which presented a statistical enumeration of this totality; and in numerous other intellectual developments of the 1930s and 1940s.

Equally important to the birth of the economy, however, was a series of events outside the professional fields of economics and statistics, which those fields had little or no ability to comprehend. These included the collapse of the international financial system in the interwar period; the domestic crises of the Great Depression; the development of Soviet, New Deal, fascist, and other forms of state control of production, trade, employment, and investment; the wartime management of technology, information, supply, and consumption; and, of particular significance, the collapse in the years during and on either side of World War II of the global structure of political and economic affairs formed by the European and Japanese empires. Out of this series of political implosions, social disintegrations, financial failures, and worldwide conflicts emerged this new object, the economy.

The economy did not come about as a new name for the processes of exchange that economists had always studied. It occurred as the reorganization and transformation of those and other processes, into an object that had not previously existed. The crises and forces that brought about this transformation lay partly in actions economists had always studied, but for the most part were far wider and more diverse. These “extraeconomic” origins of the economy made possible new forms of value, new kinds of equivalence, new practices of calculation, new relations between human agency and the nonhuman, and new distinctions between what was real and the forms of its representation.

So is the conclusion one should draw that the birth of the economy occurred as a transformation at the material level as much as the level of representations? Not at all. If we begin from the assumption that these separate
levels are something fixed and occur in a given relation to one another, such a transformation cannot be understood. The distinction between the material world and its representation is not something we can take as a starting point. It is an opposition that is made in social practice, and the forms of this opposition that we take for granted are both comparatively recent and relatively unstable. In an earlier book, Colonising Egypt, I explored the making of the modern practices of representation in the colonial politics of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the time span on which this book is focused, the economy became arguably the most important set of practices for organizing what appears as the separation of the real world from its representations, of things from their values, of actions from intentions, of an object world from the realm of ideas. We take these kinds of distinctions as something foundational, as the basis on which our ordinary understandings of social life are built, and as the framework of the modern social sciences. However, since the mechanisms that set up the separations precede, as we will see, the separation itself, the foundation is not as stable as it seems. This problem occurs with special force in the case of the economy, because its organization and understanding are so dependent on the distinctions in question.

I suggested just now that one important contribution to the making of the economy was the collapse of a global network of European and other empires. Before the 1930s it would have been difficult to describe something called the “British economy,” for example, in part because the forms of trade, investment, currency, power, and knowledge that might be constituted as an economy were organized on an imperial rather than a national scale. There was no easy way, therefore, to enclose them within a single space, to envisage them or organize them as the kind of bounded territorial entity that the making of an economy required. In fact it may have been at the level of the colony, rather than the metropolitan power, that this territorial framing of an economy was first possible. Keynes, who was a key figure in the making of the economy within economics and government, wrote his first book while employed at the India Office in London, the successor to the East India Company, the corporate colonizing power in which James Mill, Robert Malthus, and John Stuart Mill, three of the leading figures in nineteenth-century political economy, had all held senior positions. The book Keynes wrote, Indian Economy and Finance, addressed issues that were critical to his later formulation of the concept of a national economy—the state’s control of the circulation of money within a defined geographical space. There are excellent studies of the role that ruling India played in the formation of modern British political theory. However, the
question of how far twentieth-century economics also has a colonial genealogy has been overlooked.

This book examines the making of the economy, and broader questions about politics and expertise, in a postcolonial context. In common with other uses of the term, the word “postcolonial” in my title does not refer to the period after the end of colonialism (an end it might be difficult to locate). It refers to forms of critical practice that address the significance of colonialism in the formation and practice of social theory. Colonialism, from this perspective, was not incidental to the development of the modern West, nor to the emergence there of new forms of technical expertise, including the modern social sciences.

The possibility of social science is based upon taking certain historical experiences of the West as the template for a universal knowledge. Economics offers a particularly clear illustration of this. Certain forms of social exchange, contract law, disposition of property, corporate powers, methods of calculation, dispossession of labor, relationship between public and private, organization of information, and government regulation that were formalized in western Europe in the nineteenth century as “market exchange” were abstracted by economics into the framework of a social science. The new science ignored the importance of a larger structure of empire in making possible these domestic arrangements. At the same time, it presented these categories and arrangements as a general standard, for both scientific knowledge and social practice. Every country in the world was now to be measured and understood in relation to this universal model.

I draw attention to this history not, it should be emphasized, to make the facile argument of cultural relativism: that economics works in the West, but since other cultures are different they need their own social sciences. The concepts of the social sciences can always be translated from one context to another, as Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us. They can operate just as well outside the West as within, and just as badly. The formation of the so-called market practices of the nineteenth century and earlier was, as I said, a global phenomenon. And a worldwide project involving colonial government, the colleges of the East India Company, American academic visitor programs, metropolitan universities, intergovernmental organizations, the Ford Foundation, and other agencies transformed economics into a global form of knowledge—the term global referring to a widespread but very thin network of ties and exchanges.

Unlike an argument about cultural relativism, a postcolonial perspective locates these problems of colonialism, global expansion, and translation within the history and practice of the science, rather than outside it as
secondary issues that might be addressed after the science is already formed. And it examines the reasons for and significance of the silence on these issues in the scientific field, or their location as something secondary. Although the offices of the East India Company in London have now given way to the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C. or the World Trade Organization in Geneva, and the production and export of technocratic expertise is organized from American university campuses rather than the company’s Haileybury College in Hertfordshire where Malthus taught, the issues raised by postcolonialism are no less relevant today—and perhaps more so—than in the days of Malthus and Mill.

The chapters of this book span both ends of this history, from the apex of British colonial power in the later decades of the nineteenth century, to the structural adjustment and financial stabilization programs of the IMF at the close of the twentieth. All the chapters deal with events in one particular place, the country of Egypt. This gives an element of continuity, I hope, to discussions that in other ways are quite diverse. Not all of them are concerned directly with the question of the economy. The issues I have just raised emerge in the first two chapters and are addressed directly in the third, and I look at them again from a variety of contemporary perspectives in the final three chapters.

The book as a whole examines a wider set of issues concerned, to express them too abstractly, with problems of social calculation, agency, abstraction, violence, law, capitalism, and expertise. By writing about these abstract issues in a particular place, I also locate them in particular episodes, projects, conflicts, and transformations. This is a book of political theory, but it sets forth a kind of theory that, for reasons that will become clearer, avoids the method of abstraction from the particular that usually characterizes a work of theory. The theory lies in the complexity of the cases. This introduction abstracts from these particulars in ways that are misleading, and perhaps at times opaque. It therefore offers no substitute for what lies in the chapters themselves.

The first theme to which I want to draw attention is the question of “the character of calculability.” Borrowed from the German sociologist Georg Simmel, the phrase provides the title of chapter 3, but the theme is taken up in several other parts of the book. The economy, I have already suggested, can be understood as a set of practices that puts in place a new politics of calculation. The practices that form the economy operate, in part, to establish equivalences, contain circulations, identify social actors or agents, make quantities and performances measurable, and designate relations of
control and command. The economy must also, as Michel Callon has argued, operate as a series of boundaries, distinctions, exceptions, and exclusions. For example, the economy depends upon, and helps establish, boundaries between the monetary and the nonmonetary, national and foreign, consumption and investment, public and private, nature and technology, tangible and intangible, owner and nonowner, and many more. How are these boundaries and exceptions made? What calculations do they make possible? What problems arise and what costs are incurred? These kinds of questions are explored at several points, from a variety of angles, especially in the book’s final three chapters dealing with the contemporary period. Chapter 3 looks back to the first half of the twentieth century, however, to ask how certain forms of calculability were first formatted.

Great Britain invaded and occupied Egypt in 1882, to put down a popular revolt against government misrule and European financial control. After putting an end to the uprising and reestablishing Cairo’s authority over the countryside, one of Britain’s first preoccupations was a vast project of calculation. To reorganize the tax revenues and pay the country’s debts to European banking houses (emergency measures to pay the debts had precipitated the revolt), the colonial power set out to determine, for every square meter of the country’s agricultural land, the owner, the cultivator, the quality of the soil, and the proper rate of tax. To collect, organize, and represent this information, the authorities decided to produce something never achieved before, a “great land map of Egypt.” The map was intended not just as an instrument of administrative control or geographical knowledge, but as a means of recording complex statistical information in a centralized, miniaturized, and visual form. It was to provide not just a diagram of reality, but a mechanism for collecting, storing, and manipulating multiple levels of information.

In recent years the production of maps has often been taken to epitomize the character of colonial power, and by extension the power of the modern state. The map signifies the massive production of knowledge, the accuracy of calculation, and the entire politics based upon a knowledge of population and territory that Foucault characterizes as governmentality, the characteristic power of the modern state. The map can also be said to prefigure the work of twentieth-century economics, defining a contained geographical space to be organized later as a national economy, and addressing issues of statistical information that were to play a central role.

Although the great land map of Egypt was celebrated for its accuracy and for solving several technical problems in the conduct of large-scale surveys, its successful completion in 1907 obscured something important.
The map did not produce a more accurate or detailed knowledge of its object than earlier forms of governmental practice. In fact, the calculations that it was supposed to enable were never quite made possible. What exactly, then, was new about this novel politics of calculation, and from where did it derive its power and appeal? Chapter 3 opens with these questions, then relates them to the larger project that emerged in Egypt, as elsewhere, over the following decades: the making of the national economy.

The question of calculation is related to a second theme I want to identify, that of human agency. In the social sciences, the ability to calculate often defines the existence and power of human beings as social agents. In economics and in parts of other disciplines, social explanation is organized around the question of the calculations made among individuals, presenting particular arrangements or events as the outcome of a sequence of interacting computations. (Conversely, the supposed inability of certain social actors—peasants, for example—to calculate their situation, as we will see, provided the justification for an entire politics of social improvement, and for later programs of technical development.) In chapter 1, I present a complex story from the mid-twentieth century in which the forms of agency involved appear to be not only those of humans. A variety of other forces come in to play. These might be called the forces of technology, disease, hydraulics, war, nature, chemistry, and several others—except that, because of the way they interact, it would be difficult to contain them within any of these categories. One of the things with which they interact, in different ways, is what we call human intention. The results of the interactions are complex, and in several cases disastrous. As one unravels these interwoven forces, human agency appears less as a calculating intelligence directing social outcomes and more as the product of a series of alliances in which the human element is never wholly in control. Is human agency a disembodied form of reason, observing, calculating, and reorganizing the world before it? Or is it rather more of a technical body, manufactured out of processes that precede the difference between ideas and things, between human and nonhuman? If so, what consequences follow for thinking about social explanation, or the logic of history, or for analyzing processes, such as the economic, that are formatted as the outcome of human calculation?

The issues of agency and calculation raise common questions about the way the modern world is divided—into objects and ideas, nature and culture, reality and its representation, the nonhuman and the human. Several other parts of the book explore these divisions in further ways. In each case, I am interested in the local methods of organization, the particular po-
itical techniques, and the novel social practices, that seem to secure this bifurcation of the world. In each case, the scale and thoroughness with which the distinction is set up is quite remarkable. Yet at the same time, on closer examination, and focusing on the process rather than what is presented as the end result, the status of the binarism is less certain.

Another variety of this separation, one that plays a critical role in the making of the economy, is the phenomenon of the rule or the institution. Economic theory, as I discuss later in the book, depends upon maintaining a continuous but difficult distinction between the act of exchange and the formal and informal rules or institutions that structure the exchange. At the wider scale of the economy as a whole, the same problem arises of distinguishing between the totality of economic exchanges, whose aggregation is measured as the economy, and the powers of government, law, statistical production, and economic knowledge that structure the economic whole.

In a market economy, a central example of such an institution is the law of property. Property depends upon a set of rules and sanctions that determine an individual’s power to dispose of an object in the act of exchange. The rules also establish his or her power to exclude or limit the claims that others may make upon that object. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, there was a significant global movement to reinforce, redefine, and universalize the rules of property. Egypt was one of many countries in the world where the privatization of state-owned enterprises, the reform of corporate and contract law, the reorganization of trade barriers, and expanded claims about the corporate ownership of what is called intellectual property attempted in different ways to recast and extend the rules of property. In the final part of the book, I examine some of the difficulties and questions this project encountered.

The law of property gains its power by appearing as an abstraction. It seems to stand as a conceptual structure, based not on particular claims or histories but on “principles true in every country,” in the words of a British colonial administrator. Chapter 2 explores this issue in the context of a question about the origin and status of such rules, examining the genealogy of the law of landed property in Egypt and its relation to the formation of the larger institutional structure of the modern state. The government officials and European advisors who helped establish the law considered it the opposite of the older forms of rule that the modern state replaced, which appeared to them to rest upon arbitrary decision, the making of exceptions, and the prerogatives of unrestrained power. (The same distinctions were made at the end of the twentieth century, when the universal
rules of property and the price mechanism were advocated as a replacement for forms of central command, arbitrary state power, and the irrational allocation of resources that characterized nonmarket political economies.) The genealogy presented in chapter 2, as well as my later discussions of the contemporary period, suggest we should be suspicious of this distinction. Did the establishing of a law of property replace the forms of arbitrariness, particularism, and force said to characterize the old order? Or was it rather a process that redistributed, concentrated, and concealed within itself these negative elements? What role do the negatives that colonialism or contemporary reform programs claim to banish play in making possible the rule of law or the market, or the institutionalized forms of power that accompany that rule?

The discussion of the rule of property and the institutionalization of the law-state connect with a number of other themes that recur in the book, to which I will refer briefly. The first is the question of territory. If the modern state is characterized by what appears as a structure of rules or institutions whose regularity and abstractness separates it from the social order it governs, it is also distinguished by its territorial character. It seems to acquire a new clarity and absoluteness in its control over a particular geographical region. The containing of individual political and economic exchanges within a framework of rules appears to be matched by the containment of collective exchanges, movements, values, and identities within a territorial frame. Frontiers are demarcated as fixed lines, the movement of population and goods across those lines is controlled in unprecedented ways, and marginal forms of political life, where allegiance to the central authority was graduated or variable, increasingly give way to more uniform and rigorous methods of control. These are issues raised in chapter 2, but their discussion continues at several further points, including chapters 6 and 7. These discussions relate the production or materialization of territoriality both to the possibility of making the economy and to the power to make rules, technics, or institutions appear separate from the supposedly material world they govern.

The production of this new territorial power also makes possible the making of the nation. It is often forgotten that the modern state that emerged in the Lower Nile valley in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not yet a national state. Cairo and its hinterland were ruled as part of the Ottoman Empire, and although Ottoman sovereignty was increasingly tenuous, especially after the British occupation, the link with Istanbul was not formally ended until the eve of the Empire’s collapse, in 1914. Even beyond that moment, until the Ottoman defeat in World War
I. Ottomanism remained the larger context of local political identity, especially after 1913, when military modernizers led by Jamal Pasha and Enver Pasha took power in Istanbul. After the war the British reorganized the local Ottoman dynasty in Cairo as a national monarchy, and saw their own control reduced by the measures of partial independence they were forced to negotiate with a new constitutional government in 1922 and 1936. In the course of these events a national politics emerged, but the tensions between nationalism, monarchism, and colonialism—and broader popular pressures that none of these could represent—ended in a military coup in 1952 that brought an end to both the British and the monarchy, and enabled a fuller measure of national independence.

It is a minor but indicative fact that the first two leaders of postindependence Egypt, men born in the final months of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, had been named by their fathers after the two Ottoman generals, Jamal and Enver. The governments of Jamal Abdul Nasser and Anwar Sadat helped complete the recasting of local history as the history of an Egyptian nation, so the wider Ottoman past, and the alternative futures it had contained, were forgotten or overwritten by the newer identities of pan-Arabism. The idea of Egypt as a nation was projected back into the nineteenth century, and the nineteenth-century rulers of Cairo were transformed into proto-nationalists. History, once again, could be understood as the unfolding of a singular logic—the awakening of a nation into the universal consciousness of modernity.

Making the nation was not a project completed in the earlier part of the century, for the nation is an identity that must be continually remade. National history is something taught in schools and inculcated in the forms of public culture, but it is also performed in the lives of ordinary citizens. In Egypt, the performance of the past involved questions of the relationship of Cairo’s political elites to the West, and at the same time their relationship to their own wider society, especially the mass of people known as “the peasantry.” Chapter 6 considers the struggle over defining the nation’s past, examined through two interconnected episodes involving a village in southern Egypt. What happens when the politics of making contemporary Egypt works through the making of its national past? Through what forms of politics, expertise, violence, and resistance does the identity of a nation get made?

Nationalism and violence lead back to the question I raised at the start about the logic of history. Throughout the book I am concerned with the question of how one can relate what happens in a particular place to what we call the global forces of modernity, of science and technology, and of the
expansion of capitalism. Chapter 1, for example, examines a series of seemingly global forces—technology, science, imperial power, and capitalism—and asks how one might understand the working of these different forces in a way that avoids lending to any one of them a logic, energy, and coherence it did not have. In particular, I consider how one might write about capitalism or the economic without attributing to them an internal rationality, an element of sameness, or an inherent power that is then given the credit for what happened.

I also explore in different parts of the book how the logic or rationality attributed to modernity, the market, law, science, technology, or capitalism tends to produce a certain restricted understanding of violence. Violence is thought of as the opposite of these forms of reason or logic. It usually appears to belong to nature, or to the forms of reaction against the more universal logics of history. Such reactive violence is a perennial theme in discussions of the countryside: the violence of the peasantry, its resistance to change, and its reluctance to accept authority, whether expressed in great rebellions or in everyday forms of refusal. Chapter 5, for example, deals with a brief period in the mid-1960s when battles for political control at the center of state power were also fought in the villages. Events in the Egyptian countryside coincided with the arrival of a new generation of American social science, focused for the first time on the non-Western world. New fields such as peasant studies, a form of expertise whose genealogy is examined in chapter 4, had been built up by the 1960s, and the questions of violence, disorder, and change in the countryside were a major concern. Chapter 5 examines how these new forms of expertise addressed the issue of rural violence. It explores how the logics of social science translated the question of violence into a reactive, backward, irrational, and often invisible force.

Similar issues are raised in a different way in the last three chapters of the book, where I examine the contemporary politics of national development, foreign expertise, and economic reform. I show how the outcome of the reform programs was not the forms of market relations or capitalist development promised by the reformers, but a complex rearrangement of social practices driven by a series of different and intersecting logics. I ask about the dangers of talking about this kind of transformation in terms of the rationality and power of capital, the market, or, in the language of the 1990s, globalization. Rather than contributing further to the impression that these forces have the coherence, energy, and logic they claim for themselves, I argue the need for a more careful consideration of what can be learned from the rather more violent and unpredictable interactions these terms are used to describe.
A final theme is the one from which the book takes its title. In each of the chapters that follow, we encounter modern forms of expertise. We meet the engineers who built the Aswan Dam, the administrators who defined the law of property, the scientists and public hygienists who attacked epidemic disease, the surveyors who made the Great Map, the political scientists who diagnosed rural politics, the experts who confirmed the irrationality and violence of the peasant, and a series of development practitioners and economists who devised programs of financial aid and economic restructuring. From the opening of the twentieth century to its close, the politics of national development and economic growth was a politics of techno-science, which claimed to bring the expertise of modern engineering, technology, and social science to improve the defects of nature, to transform peasant agriculture, to repair the ills of society, and to fix the economy.

Three questions run through my examination of modern technopolitics. First, how do the binarisms fixed in place in modern politics open up the distance that requires and enables this expertise: in a particular way of writing about the peasant, for example, in a form of development practice that treats Egypt as an object laid out like a map, or in hydraulic engineering projects that reorganize the river Nile and transform the distribution of power, technology, and information across countryside? In each case, the place and the claims of expertise are constituted in the separation that seems to open up, opposing nature to technology, reality to its representation, objects to their value, and the economy to the science of economics. Second, if those separations, as the book argues, are not what they seem, if they occur not as fundamental oppositions but as uncertain forms of difference constituted, and at the same time undermined, in the political process, how is the expertise actually formed? What can we learn from its difficult and divided genealogy? Third, if these separations allow reason to rule, and allow history to be organized as the unfolding of a locationless logic, how does expertise attach itself to this logic? What strategies, structures, and silences transform the expert into a spokesperson for what appear as the forces of development, the rules of law, the progress of modernity, or the rationality of capitalism?