2018

Cairo's Coffeehouses In The Late Nineteenth- And Early Twentieth-Centuries: An Urban And Socio-Political History

Alon Tam
University of Pennsylvania, alontam@hotmail.com

Cairo's Coffeehouses In The Late Nineteenth- And Early Twentieth-Centuries: An Urban And Socio-Political History

Abstract
ABSTRACT

CAIRO'S COFFEEHOUSES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURIES: AN URBAN AND SOCIO-POLITICAL HISTORY

Alon Tam

Heather J. Sharkey

Coffeehouses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cairo were an urban hub for working- and middle-class men, as well as for a growing number of women, for politicians, revolutionaries, intellectuals, and journalists, for immigrants and locals, and for people from different ethnic, racial, and religious communities. Indeed, coffeehouses were a fundamental social and cultural, even political, institution. They were embedded in Cairo's landscape, and in the daily routines of its inhabitants. Their emergence offered new opportunities for socializing to more groups in society, they were a place of leisure and entertainment that supported popular culture, and they were a crucial part of the political public sphere. Using a rich mix of sources, such as spy reports, photographs, memoirs, guides, various descriptions of Cairo and its inhabitants, interviews, census data, and newspapers, this study traces the rich history of Cairo's coffeehouses roughly from the 1870s to 1919, with an in depth look also at their longue durée history before the late nineteenth century. This study aims to show how the history of coffeehouses as actual places, not merely theorized sites, can shed light on a variety of critical developments. In particular, the history of Cairo's coffeehouses illuminates many broader histories involving, for example, the construction of social hierarchies, the performance of class and gender, urban and economic development in Cairo, the assertion of colonialism and state-led surveillance, the construction of nationalism and mass politics, and more

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

First Advisor
Heather J. Sharkey

Subject Categories
Islamic World and Near East History

CAIRO'S COFFEEHOUSES IN THE LATE

NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES:

AN URBAN AND SOCIO-POLITICAL HISTORY

Alon Tam

A DISSERTATION
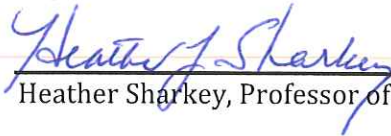
in

Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2018

Supervisor of Dissertation

_____

Heather Sharkey, Professor of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

Graduate Group Chair

_____

Joseph E. Lowry, Associate Professor of Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

Dissertation Committee:
Eve M. Troutt Powell, Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of History
Renata Holod, Professor of History of Art, College for Women Class of 1963 Professor in
the Humanities

CAIRO'S COFFEEHOUSES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURIES:

AN URBAN AND SOCIO-POLITICAL HISTORY

COPYRIGHT

2018

Alon Tam

To My Mother, Gabriella (Gabi) Tam (Neuberger)

And

To My Father, Joseph Tam

Acknowledgement

It takes a village to raise a PhD candidate, and the list of people and institutions to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude that I can never repay is long indeed.

ABSTRACT

CAIRO'S COFFEEHOUSES IN THE LATE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-

CENTURIES: AN URBAN AND SOCIO-POLITICAL HISTORY

Alon Tam

Heather J. Sharkey

Coffeehouses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cairo were an urban hub for working- and middle-class men, as well as for a growing number of women, for politicians, revolutionaries, intellectuals, and journalists, for immigrants and locals, and for people from different ethnic, racial, and religious communities. Indeed, coffeehouses were a fundamental social and cultural, even political, institution. They were embedded in Cairo's landscape, and in the daily routines of its inhabitants. Their emergence offered new opportunities for socializing to more groups in society, they were a place of leisure and entertainment that supported popular culture, and they were a crucial part of the political public sphere. Using a rich mix of sources, such as spy reports, photographs, memoirs, guides, various descriptions of Cairo and its inhabitants, interviews, census data, and newspapers, this study traces the rich history of Cairo's coffeehouses roughly from the 1870s to 1919, with an in depth look also at their *longue durée* history before the late nineteenth century. This study aims to show how the history of coffeehouses as actual places, not merely theorized sites, can shed light on a variety of critical developments. In particular, the history of Cairo's coffeehouses illuminates many broader histories involving, for example, the construction of social hierarchies, the performance of class and gender, urban and economic development in Cairo, the assertion of colonialism and state-led surveillance, the construction of nationalism and mass politics, and more

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

Note on Transliteration

This study uses the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* system of

transliteration for Arabic, with the following modifications:

1) The *Tā Marbūṭah* is rendered *-ah*.

2) *Hamzah* and *ʿAyn* are always preserved, and so are all diacritics in footnotes.

3) Proper names that have a common usage in English are not transliterated. Hence:

   Ali and not *ʿAlī*.

4) The definite article with connectors is rendered *lil-* and not *li-l-*, etc.

5) Transliteration is made from formal, written, Modern Standard Arabic, and not

   Egyptian pronunciation, hence: al-Jamāliyyah and not Gamaliyyah.

All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

Coffeehouses in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cairo were an urban hub for working- and middle-class men, as well as for a growing number of women, for politicians, revolutionaries, intellectuals, and journalists, for immigrants and locals, and for people from different ethnic, racial, and religious communities. Indeed, coffeehouses were a fundamental social and cultural, even political, institution. They were imbedded in Cairo's landscape, and in the daily routines of its inhabitants. Their emergence offered new opportunities for socializing to more groups in society, they were a place of leisure and entertainment that supported popular culture, and they were a crucial part of the political public sphere. The rich history of Cairo's coffeehouses can therefore shed light on a variety of developments and give insights to several of the most salient topics in current historiographical debates about Egypt, from colonialism to Europeanization and modernization, from the urban history of Cairo to its economic history, from the intersections of class and social identity to the intersections of class and gender, from cultural history to food history, from nationalism to mass politics.

The Thematic Contours of this Study

Unfortunately, one study cannot possibly encompass such large a scope. Therefore, this one will focus on a *longue durée* urban and social history of Cairo's coffeehouses, and then will delve in more detail to their role as part of the political public sphere during the first couple of decades of the twentieth century. Aside from reasons of personal interest, the very early emergence of coffeehouses in Cairo, their ubiquity, and the sources, both primary and secondary, make that city a natural choice for a history of coffeehouses. Only cursory references will be made to other cities, mainly to Istanbul and Alexandria. This study is therefore an open invitation for a broader research on coffeehouses in a variety of urban and non-urban settings in the Middle East.

This study is also decidedly about coffeehouses, and not coffee. Recent research is slowly uncovering a history of eating and drinking coffee before coffeehouses. *Coffea* is indigenous to the Horn of Africa, specifically to nowadays Ethiopia, and it crossed Bāb al-Mandab (the Mandab Strait) into the Yemen sometime around the 15th century. Agriculturalists, nomads, and city dwellers around those regions used the coffee bean for food, and brewed its husk for drink. Available evidence shows that men used to drink that brew from a communal bowl, sitting in a circle, much in the same way that they consumed wine (something that prompted an uneasy association between wine and coffee). Sufis were among the first to use coffee as a stimulant drink to stay awake during their nightly ceremonies, and among the first to bring it from Ethiopia to Yemen and trade in it. Changing the communal bowls to individual small cups facilitated the emergence of coffeehouses in the fifteenth century, first in Mecca and Medina, and then in Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo, and from there in Istanbul. From Istanbul, coffeehouses

spread throughout the Ottoman Empire, and from there coffee made its way to Europe in the 17th century. Coffee was commercially cultivated in Yemen since the sixteenth century, and by the eighteenth century also in European colonies across the New World, which rivaled Yemen's monopoly. People, however, continued to drink coffee outside coffeehouses: in their homes, with family and guests, in bathhouses, in shops when sitting down to make a purchase, in weddings, funerals, festivals, and religious ceremonies.[1]

This particular history, of the cultivation of coffee, its ways of preparation, and the development of the taste for it, remains largely outside the purview of this study. The economic history of coffee and coffeehouses, that is, the world trade in coffee and the business side of coffeehouses, were also left out of this study, except where they were relevant to certain points about the rise and spread of coffeehouses, or about their class dynamics. These thematic exclusions leave us with a focused history of coffeehouses as a social institution: their development in the context of Cairo's urban history, their owners and clients, their architecture and internal design, their foodways, the kinds of entertainment and sociability they offered, and their role in the political public sphere.

---

[1] For a global history of coffee, see: Steven Topik, "Coffee as a Social Drug," *Cultural Critique* 71 (Winter, 2009): 81-106. For general histories of coffee and coffeehouses in the Middle East, see: Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials : espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, Cahiers des annales Islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001); Hélène Desmet-Grégoire (ed.), *Contributions au thème du café et des cafés dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient* (Aix-en-Provence : Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman, CNRS-Universités d'Aix-Marseille, 1992).

The Temporal Contours of this Study

As noted above, coffeehouses originated in the Arabic-speaking Middle East around the turn of the sixteenth century, or late in the fourteenth century, that is, only a few decades before the Ottoman conquest of the Mamluk realms in the Levant, Arabia, and Egypt. Coffeehouses, then, are essentially an Ottoman phenomenon, or if one is too attached to Euro-centric periodizations, coffeehouses can be said to be an Early Modern phenomenon. Although the primary temporal focus of this study lies between the 1870s and 1919, the fundamental changes that occurred in Cairo's coffeehouse scene during that time can only be understood against its Ottoman past, both the immediate one and the longer term one.

This has a decelerating effect on the temporality of this study. It begins with a *longue durée* survey of the urban and socio-cultural history of coffeehouses in Cairo, more or less since their emergence in the sixteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. The aim here is to highlight major patterns and developments in the urban and social evolution of Cairo's coffeehouses, against which the developments since the mid-nineteenth century will be compared and assessed. The latter period witnessed a massive urban growth that changed Cairo's landscape, and introduced new urban forms and institutions, including a new kind of coffeehouses. Those European-style coffeehouses were opened as part of building new European-style neighborhoods, a process that started at the turn of the nineteenth century, but was accelerated during the reign of Khedive Ismail (1863-1879), and especially during the 1890s. Those new coffeehouses influenced the existing ones in several ways, and they were understood by Cairenes to be markers of

borrowing and adapting "European" cultural forms, markers of social distinction, and even of economic exploitation.

This study ends with the *1919 Revolution*, a year-long series of mass protests against British colonial rule, in which Cairo's coffeehouses played a major role. Since the next part of this study focuses on the functioning of Cairo's coffeehouses in the networks of places that made up the political public sphere in Egypt, 1919 serves as a high point for examining the contribution of coffeehouses to the emergence of mass politics, and thus it is also a fitting end point.

Some Notes on the Historical Context

It would be unnecessarily ambitious to attempt here a full history of Ottoman and post-Ottoman Egypt as an introductory context for this study, even though the history of coffeehouses, as we will learn, touches on many of the principal developments of their time.[2] The limited and scattered information we do have about Cairo's coffeehouses between the sixteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, including any historical changes they went through, will be extensively discussed in chapter 1. Suffice it to note here that during the sixteenth century, Cairo – where coffeehouses became a popular novelty before it happened in Istanbul – had gradually grown to be the most important point of

---

[2] Some very good places to start would be: Kenneth M. Cuno, "Egypt to c. 1919," in Francis Robinson (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 5: The Islamic World in the Age of Western Dominance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation State*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 2004); Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., *A Brief History of Egypt* (New York: Facts on File, 2008).

distribution for Yemenite coffee to the entire Ottoman Empire, a position it maintained up until the turn of the twentieth century.[3]

Beyond Cairo's commercial centrality in the coffee trade, at least in the Ottoman Empire if not beyond, its coffeehouses shared some characteristics with coffeehouses from Istanbul to Tunis, and did not share others. For example, Cairo's coffeehouses shared the same basic physical design with other Ottoman coffeehouses, they shared some of the important leisurely activities that accompanied coffee-drinking such as smoking the waterpipe, and the *karagoz* theater, or some popular singers, even performed in Turkish for Turkish-speaking patrons of Cairo's coffeehouses. Moreover, the prevalence of rowdy, low-level, Turkish-speaking, Ottoman soldiers and officers among the owners and clients of Cairo's coffeehouses was a reality that they shared with coffeehouses all around the Empire. On the other hand, Cairo's coffeehouses were, for example, rather modest in comparison to some of the opulent coffeehouses in Istanbul, and they mostly catered to the lower classes, unlike some of the coffeehouses in Damascus, Aleppo, and Istanbul (see chapter 1). These similarities and differences epitomize the sharing of the same Ottoman socio-cultural world, without glossing over significant local variations.

The "long nineteenth century," defined by some historians as extending between the French occupation of Egypt in 1798 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, witnessed rapid and far-reaching changes, even upheavals, in many aspects of life, and they did not forgo Cairo's coffeehouse scene. After three years of French occupation

---

[3] Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café*, 69-127; Eyal Ginio, "When Coffee Brought about Wealth and Prestige: The Impact of Egyptian Trade on Salonica," *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, 86/1 (2006), 93-107.

(1798-1801), whose impact is debated among historians, the new and ambitious Ottoman governor of Egypt, Mehmet Ali (r. 1805-1848), launched his own military occupation campaigns into the Sudan, al-Shām, and the Arabian Peninsula. Although most of this empire building efforts were short-lived, with the notable exception of Sudan, those efforts did fundamentally change the status of Egypt in the Ottoman Empire, and they changed Egypt itself. Egypt became an autonomous and powerful province, and gradually disconnected itself, over the course of that whole "long nineteenth century," from the Ottoman world. Mehmet Ali wrested a recognition from the Sultan of his dynastic rule, and restyled himself Khedive (that title was formally recognized by the Sultan only in 1867, for his grandson Ismail). The large standing army that Mehmet Ali built, the agrarian reforms he initiated, the Western education and schools he introduced, among other initiatives, all laid the foundations for the emergence of a modern state in Egypt, as well as of new social groups that supported it.[4]

Mehmet Ali's successors, and especially Khedive Ismail (r. 1863-1879), presided over such initiatives that continued to transform Egyptian society. While they generally did not wage large scale military campaigns, they did continue to tie the Ottoman elite to the House of Muhammad Ali, while disconnecting it from its Ottoman background, "Egyptianizing," and "Arabizing" it in the process.[5] The Arabic-speaking rural landowners grew more rich and powerful, demanded their share of political and social power, and eventually merged into the Ottoman ruling elite. Western and technical

---

[4] Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[5] Ehud R. Toledano, "Forgetting Egypt's Ottoman Past," in Jayne L. Warner (ed.), *Cultural Horizons: A Festschrift in Honor of Talat S. Halman* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 150-67.

education, as well as the state bureaucracy and army, which expanded significantly during the nineteenth century, gave rise to a new, Arabic-speaking and native, middle class of bureaucrats, army officers, professionals, and intellectuals. They developed, and publicly debated, a new worldview, and new cultural and social identities. At their core lied the conception that this social group was, or was becoming, modern, part of a global – read: European – modern middle class. By the end of the nineteenth century, this new social group also demanded its share of political and social power, in the form of an elected and powerful parliament, and a responsible government. Coupled with resentment at what became to be European domination, this group was also the standard bearer of Egyptian nationalism. The development of agricultural industry, and the large estates in the countryside, transformed rural society as well, dispossessing small agriculturalists and pushing them to migrate to the city, where they joined and expanded the urban working class.

The role that women – at least, elite women – played in society also changed dramatically. Egyptian-Ottoman elite women always yielded political and social power, and they exercised it by the means available to them in the context in which they lived: a system of harem slavery, being largely confined to their harems with multiple consorts, playing household politics through marriages and childbirth, and accumulating personal wealth. The gradual disappearance of harem and household slavery during the nineteenth century fundamentally changed the structure of elite families, transforming them into single couple families, turning marriages into love marriages, and promoting domesticity. That, and the encounter with European women who immigrated or visited Egypt and brought with them such new habits as socializing with men in public, pushed elite and

middle class women to break such intrenched social habits as harem confinement. It pushed elite women to find new avenues, or new public places, for political and social activism. Middle class women and men used the new platforms of publishing and print media to debate the new role of women in society and other women rights, and they turned Egyptian women into a nationalistic icon, as "mothers of the nation."[6]

These social transformations during the nineteenth century were predicated on significant population growth, as well as on far-reaching economic and technological transformations. Beyond the development of large countryside estates and agricultural industry (especially cotton), light industry was also developed by the initiative of Egyptian and foreign investors. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, after a decade of works, drew Egypt much further into the European imperialist and capitalist system. Railways, and other infrastructure in communications and transportation, were also laid by Egyptians and Europeans. As a result, Egypt experienced periods of economic booms – and crisis – which attracted European investors and European capital, many immigrants, and eventually also European imperial and colonial intervention.

It should be emphasized that initially at least, Egypt's rulers and elites not only welcomed European influence, but actively solicited it, and not necessarily from a position of weakness, subservience, or a crisis of self-worth. For one thing, cultural, economic, and technological exchanges between Egypt and Europe was nothing new. Moreover, Egyptians had a utilitarian approach to such exchange: some of what Europe

---

[6] Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and the Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

had to offer, especially in the realms of technology and financial capital, was advantageous to Egypt's leaders. French-educated Khedive Ismail even saw the adoption of some European – mainly French – cultural forms and styles as a way to project power and prestige to his own elite, to Europe itself, and to Istanbul. Thus, opening an opera in Cairo was meant to put Egypt on the world stage. Many among the new middle class, or more precisely, the effendiyyah, also saw the adoption of European technology, knowhow, and cultural habits as a way to join global modernity. The introduction of print media early in the nineteenth century – it significantly took off only in the 1870s – was crucial in disseminating the different views and debates around those issues. It was crucial in changing and shaping people's minds and imaginations, and in creating a public sphere in which to discuss those questions. Thus, print media became indispensable for the creation and propagation of a colossal cultural and intellectual movement, called the *Nahḍah*, or 'Revival,' which encompassed anything from Arabic literature and language, to science and philosophy, to religion.[7]

Egypt's post-French-occupation openness to Europe, and the economic boom it experienced, brought into the country many European experts, advisers, and diplomats,

---

[7] For general surveys about the developments noted here, see: Cuno, "Egypt to c. 1919;" Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*. On the social transformations of the nineteenth century, see: Ehud R. Toledano, *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the Egyptian-Ottoman elites, and the use of European culture by Khedive Ismail, see: Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism: The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). On the middle class and modernity, see: Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). On Egyptian nationalism, see: Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). On the history of transportation, communications, and technology in Egypt, see: On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). The classic work on the *Nahḍah* is: Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

then merchants, investors, and industrialists, and from mid-century on, also a veritable influx of skilled or unskilled workers, and small businessmen in search of economic opportunity. As will be discussed in chapter 2, many of the latter saw that opportunity in opening "European"-style coffeehouses. Immigrants poured into Egypt from all over the Mediterranean, especially from Greece and Italy, but they were also Shuwwām (Syro-Lebanese), French, Moroccans, and other North Africans and Ottomans, even from the Yemen. North and East European immigrants came from Britain – especially after it occupied Egypt in 1882 – the German-speaking countries, Eastern Europe, and even Russia. Those immigrants changed the landscape and social makeup of Cairo and Alexandria, in particular, with far-reaching implications for Egypt's economy, legal system, and the articulations of communal and national identities.[8]

As European economic interests in Egypt grew, especially those of Britain and France, they seized on Egypt's soaring foreign debt in the 1870s to impose their control over the country's economics, and later over the country as a whole. Khedive Ismail was obliged to hand Egyptian finances over to Britain and France, first as part of a European Debt Commission (1876), then as leading a Dual Control financial regime (1877), and finally by bringing in a Briton and a Frenchman into his cabinet (1878), promising to rule through his ministers. The British-French economies that hurt, among others, middle-rank Egyptian army officers, prompted them to stage a political intervention, buttressed by outbursts of popular protest in Cairo and Alexandria, between 1879 and 1882, led by Egyptian Colonel Ahmad ʿUrābī (1841-1911). Widely considered to be the first instance

---

[8] Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

of modern Egyptian nationalism, the participants in the *Urabi Revolution*, as it became known, acting on new ideologies, and enjoying popular support, revolted against foreign intervention, and forced the new Khedive, Tawfīq (r. 1879-92), to promulgate a constitution, and open an elected parliament. Henceforth, these two issues, fighting against foreign control, and for a constitutional monarchy, would be the bedrock of Egyptian nationalist politics until the 1920s. In the meantime, it also prompted the British military occupation of Egypt in 1882, which started by crushing the *Urabi Revolution*.[9]

The British did not assume formal rule of Egypt until the outbreak of the First World War. Instead, they deemed it much more expedient to deal with a compliant Egyptian government, led by the Khedive, and with nominal Ottoman suzerainty, perhaps because initially they truly did not intend to expend the vast resources needed to keep a full colonial regime. In time, however, they did expand and consolidate their rule in the country, a process that was overseen by the towering figure of Lord Cromer, the British Agent and Consul-General between 1883 and 1907. They did so by maintaining a British occupation army, reorganizing and commanding the Egyptian army and police, and putting British "advisers" and functionaries in all levels of administration in ever increasing numbers. This process did not go uncontested, in many localized ways, and on many levels.[10]

One of the more important instances of such contestation came after the sudden death of Khedive Tawfīq in 1892. His young – barely eighteen years old – son and heir,

---

[9] About the *Urabi Revolution*, see: Juan R. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East : Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[10] See: Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman (eds.), *The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II (r. 1892-1914), was eager to prove his weight and independence, and appointed a new cabinet in 1893 without consulting Lord Cromer. Cromer clarified, through London and a request for additional British troops, that his "advice" should be followed. Another public power struggle over some disparaging remarks the young Khedive has made about British-led Egyptian army units followed the next year, in which Cromer made him publicly recant his remarks. Now, the British effective rule over Egypt was overt, and it left Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī embittered. In response, he funded and supported a new wave of Egyptian nationalism, led by the young publicist and activist Mustafa Kāmil (1874-1908), and the influential newspaper *al-Muʾayyad*, edited by Shaykh Ali Yūsuf.

Kāmil and *al-Muʾayyad*, which became the palace mouthpiece, initially advocated Egyptian independence by mounting international campaigns, both public and diplomatic, in Britain, and in Europe, especially in France. However, Kāmil also favored policies that challenged the Khedive's power, such as: the kind of Pan-Islamism promoted by Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd II (r. 1876-1909) in Istanbul, and the return of the constitution and parliament that were suspended after the *Urabi Revolution*. Thus, by 1900, Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī was drawing away from the nationalists, and cultivating his ties with the British, especially in London rather than with Cromer. In 1900, Kāmil, no longer being assured of getting published in *al-Muʾayyad*, started publishing his own influential newspaper, *al-Liwāʾ*, and the two men finally broke ties in 1904. Kāmil and his followers also became disillusioned with their campaigns for Egyptian independence in Europe, and decided to turn inwards, into Egypt. They established the most popular national political party in those years, called *al-Waṭanī* (the Nationalist), and mounted a

fierce political campaign, which reached its peak in 1909-1910. It included mass protests, some strikes, extensive and fierce writing, publishing, and public speaking for the cause of independence, and even some covert activity that was linked to the political assassination of Prime Minister Boutros Ghālī. The British clamped down on this movement, especially during the First World War, when they finally deposed Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, crowned his uncle Hussein Kāmil as Sultan instead, and formally declared Egypt to be a British Protectorate. They also conscripted much of Egypt's manpower and resources to meet the war needs, on the promise of giving Egypt independence after the war was over. When that promise was not fulfilled, a massive, and sometime violent, protest broke out in 1919. It ultimately forced Britain to declare Egypt independent in 1922, while maintaining an armed presence in the country to safeguard its vital interests there. As will be discussed in chapter 4, Cairo's coffeehouses played a pivotal role in the *1919 Revolution*.[11]

Cairo's Coffeehouses in Scholarship

Coffee and coffeehouses have been subjects of scholarly attention for some time now, and especially following the pioneering works of Sidney Mintz and Jürgen Habermas.[12] Mintz's work inspired scholarship that was interested in the global itinerary of coffee, as a plant and as a drink, in the cultivation of coffee in European colonial plantations, in the world trade in coffee and its place in the history of global capitalism, as well as in the

---

[11] Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 29-53; Cuno, "Egypt to c. 1919," 94-104.
[12] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991).

production of the drink and the development of the taste for it.[13] Habermas' work on the

rise of the public sphere and civil society in Europe, through coffeehouses among other

places, inspired a slew of scholarship on the social functions of coffeehouses, as spaces

for sociability, for the development of political ideas and ideologies, as spaces that were

instrumental for the development of literary, intellectual, and philosophical circles, as

gendered spaces, even as businesses. Most of that scholarship focused on coffeehouses in

Europe, and especially in London and Paris, but also on coffeehouses in Latin America

and even East Asia.[14]

One would assume that a similar volume of scholarship about coffeehouses in the

Middle East exists, considering that coffeehouses, and to a large extent also coffee,

originated in the Middle East, or considering the ubiquity of coffeehouses in the

landscape of every urban center in the region, or their ubiquity in literature, film, and

everyday life. Surprisingly, this is not the case. The most significant body of scholarship

about coffeehouses in the Middle East focuses on early-modern Istanbul. A few

---

[13] A good example of this scholarship is: William Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik (eds.), *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[14] This literature is vast. Notable examples are: Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Aytoun Ellis, *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956); Markman Ellis, *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004); Ulla Heise, *Coffee and Coffee-Houses*, trans. Paul Roper (West Chester, PA.: Schiffer, 1987); W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Henry-Melchior de Langle, *Le petit monde de cafés et débits parisiens au XIXe siècle: évolution de la sociabilité citadine*, 1st edition, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990); Hans Weigel, Christian Brandstätter, and Werner J. Schweiger, *Das Wiener Kaffehause* (Vienna: Molden Edition, 1978); Leona Rittner (ed.), *The Thinking Space: The Café as a Cultural Institution in Paris, Italy, and Vienna* (Farnham, Surrey, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013); Jeffery Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Merry I. White, *Coffee Life in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Shachar Pinsker, *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

monographs, articles, PhD and M.A. theses, in English and Turkish, examine their urban history, architecture and design, social and cultural practices, and their political role.[15]

Beyond Istanbul, the scholarship on coffee and coffeehouses in the Middle East is somewhat general and sporadic, but nevertheless of critical importance. Virtually the single monograph-length study devoted solely to the subject remains Ralph Hattox's 1985 book *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, where he elaborated the basic narrative about the arrival of coffee in the Middle East and the emergence of coffeehouses there during the sixteenth century. He also elaborated about the cultural practices in those coffeehouses, and about the controversies they initially generated. Michel Tuchscherer's collected volume, *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials*, is the other foundational contribution to the scholarship about coffee and coffeehouses in the Middle East, as its essays explore the sixteenth to eighteenth century trade in coffee and its paraphernalia, and the social history of coffeehouses. Another collected volume, Hélène Desmet-Grégoire's *Contributions au thème du café et des cafés dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient*, adds to this overview some essays on the architecture, artifacts, foodways, and social habits of Middle Eastern coffeehouses. Assorted articles complete

---

[15] Burçak Evren, *Eski Istanbul'da Kahvehaneler*, 1st edition (Istanbul: Milliet Yayinlari, 1996); Cem Sökmen, *Aydinlarin iletisim ortami olarak eski Istanbul kahvehaneleri*, 2nd edition (Istanbul: Ötüken, 2012); Cengiz Kırlı, "The Struggle over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845" (PhD diss., State university of New York at Binghamton, 2000); Feyza Ceylan, "Eglence kavraminin Istanbul'da geçirdigi degisim süreci ve mekana etkisi" (Dissertation, Istanbul Technical University, 2004); Ali Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul" in Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2007), 117-32; Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire: Gender, Urban Space and the Ottoman Coffee House" in Sajdi, *Ottoman Tulips,* 133-70; Selma Özkoçak, "Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History*, 33 (2007), 965-86; Gwendolyn Collaco, "The Ottoman Coffeehouse: All the Charms and Dangers of Commonality in the 16th-17th Centuries," *Lights: The MESSA Quarterly*, 1/1 (Fall, 2011), 61-71; Ilay Örs, "Coffeehouses, Cosmopolitanism, and Pluralizing Modernities in Istanbul," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 12/1 (2002): 119-45.

this body of scholarship with histories of coffeehouses in different cities, from Damascus to Algiers.[16]

As for Cairo in particular, the few articles by Tuchscherer, and the one by Nelly Hanna, are essential for our knowledge and understanding of the city's coffeehouses between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.[17] A few studies in Arabic, that follow writer Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī's description of Cairo, comprise a series of biographies of the most well-known coffeehouses in the city. Admitting a lack of sources, they mainly rely on oral history, and therefore focus, for the most part, on the 1920s onwards, and on coffeehouses as literary and intellectual salons.[18] A few articles and book chapters

---

[16] Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials : espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, Cahiers des annales Islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001); Hélène Desmet-Grégoire (ed.), *Contributions au thème du café et des cafés dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient* (Aix-en-Provence: Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman, CNRS-Universités d'Aix-Marseille, 1992); Brigitte Marino, "Cafés et cafetiers de Damas aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 75-76 (1995): 275-94; Omar Carlier, "Le café maure: Sociabilité masculine et effervescence citoyenne (Algérie XVIIe-XXe siècles)," *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 4 (Jul. - Aug., 1990): 975-1003.

[17] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane (XVI-XVIII siècles)" in Hélène Desmet-Grégoire and François Georgeon (eds.), *Cafés d'Orient revisités* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1997); Nelly Hanna, "Coffee and Coffee Merchants in Cairo 1580-1630" in Tuchscherer, *Le commerce du café*, 91-101; Jean-Charles Depaule, "Les établissements de café du Caire," *Études rurales* 180 (Jul. - Dec., 2007): 245-62.

[18] Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, *Malāmiḥ al-Qāhirah fī 1000 Sanah* [The Features of Cairo during 1000 Years] (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1983); ʿĪd Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Ḥikāyah Maqāhī al-Ṣafwah wal-Kharāfīsh* [The Story of the Coffeehouses of the Elites and the Good-for-Nothings], (Cairo: Wizārah al-Thaqāfah, Al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 2014); Muḥammad Abd al-Wāḥid, *Ḥarāʾiq al-Kalām fī Maqāhī al-Qāhirah* [Incendiary Talk about Cairo's Coffeehouses] (Cairo: ʾAṭlas lil-Nashr wal-ʾIntāj al-ʾIʿlāmī, 2003); Abd al-Munʿim Shumays, *Qahāwī al-ʿAdab wal-Fann fī al-Qāhirah* [The Literary and Artistic Coffeehouses in Cairo] (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1991). On coffeehouses as literary salons in the Arab world, see: Rashīd al-Dhawādī, *Maqāhī al-ʾUdabāʾ fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī* [The Coffeehouses of the Literati in the Arab Homeland] (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Maṣriyyah al-ʿāmmah lil-Kitāb, 1999); Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Al-Maqāhī fī Taʾrīkh al-ʾAdab* [Coffeehouses in Literary History] (Cairo: Dār al-ʿUlūm lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2009). On coffeehouses in Naguib Mahfouz's oeuvre, see: Ḥasan Yūsuf Ṭaha Muṣṭafa, *Jamāliyyāt al-Makān: al-Maqha ʿinda Najīb Maḥfūẓ Namūdhaj[an]* [The Aesthetics of a Place: The Coffeehouse as an Archetype in Naguib Mahfouz] (Cairo: Maktabah Būrṣah al-Kutub lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2013); Rashīd al-Dhawādī, *Maqāhī Najīb Maḥfūẓ fī Marfaʾ al-Dhākirah!* [Naguib Mahfouz's Coffeehouses in the Harbor of Memory!] (Cairo: Maktabah Madbūlī, 2008).

complete this picture with anthropological studies of late twentieth and early twenty-first century coffeehouses.[19]

Cairo's coffeehouses are also mentioned in some studies of other subjects, but only in a cursory way, or with very limited discussion. Take for example Lucie Ryzova otherwise excellent and groundbreaking study on the Egyptian effendiyyah: it passingly mentions coffeehouses a few times, but does not discuss at any length their fundamental importance for the social reproduction of that group (see chapter 2). In his PhD dissertation, Ziad Fahmy briefly discussed the importance of coffeehouses to the development of popular songs and satire (*zajal*, *ṭaqṭūqah*), and he even discussed their role in the *1919 Revolution*; it is unfortunate that this discussion was significantly redacted in the transition from dissertation to published book.[20]

It transpires, then, that there is scarcely any research on Cairo's coffeehouses between the late eighteenth century and the interwar period in the twentieth century. This study aims at filling that gap, thus bridging the two bodies of literature. Its discussion of the appearance in Cairo of "European"-style coffeehouses during the nineteenth century and their urban, social, and cultural implications, as well as its discussion of the role of Cairo's coffeehouses in the political public sphere before and during the *1919 Revolution*,

---

[19] Mark Allen Peterson, *Connected in Cairo: Growing Up Cosmopolitan in the Modern Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 139-69; Anouk de Koning, "Café Latte and Caesar Salad: Cosmopolitan Belonging in Cairo's Coffee Shops," in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (eds.), *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 221-35; Yasser Elsheshtawy, "Urban Transformations: Social Control at al-Rifaʿi Mosque and Sultan Hasan Square," in Singerman and Amar, *Cairo Cosmopolitan*, 295-313.

[20] Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*; Ziad Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism: Colloquial Culture and Media Capitalism, 1870-1919" (PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2007); Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

are important to our understanding of the emergence of coffeehouses as political and intellectual hubs after 1919. A more detailed engagement with some of the major interventions about coffeehouses in the existing scholarship will be made throughout this study.

Some Notes on Sources and Methodology

Coffeehouses appear everywhere in the historical record of the Islamic Middle East: in legal texts, moralistic diatribes, chronicles, travelogues, descriptions of place and society, inheritance and endowment records, cadasters and censuses, secret police reports, newspapers, periodicals and journals, memoirs, poetry and literature, advertisements, sketches, paintings, lithographs, photographs, postcards, and films. The present study uses as many of these sources as possible and relevant, from Ottoman, Egyptian, British, and French descriptions of Cairo and its society, to census meta-data, newspapers and advertisement, memoirs and interviews, statistical yearbooks and tourist guides, spy reports, or photographic postcards. Mining this wealth of sources for the relevant information requires, of course, a combination of interpretational skills: one does not simply "read" a photograph the same way one reads a memoir, or a report by a spy who was working for the ruler, or for the British colonial army. Each of the sources also needs contextualization in order to understand its problems, limitations, and possibilities.

The treatment of some of these sources, such as newspapers, chronicles, memoirs, or advertisement, is the bread and butter of historical methodology and barely needs

elaboration here.[21] Some of the descriptions of Cairo and its society used in this study, especially Lane's *Manners and Customs* and the *Description de l'Egypte*, have garnered their own studies and critique. Implicated by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, some scholars discussed the role of these works in the production of imperialist and colonial knowledge: some dismissed them altogether for that reason, others defended their authors and their use. This debate is, however, unhelpful, as both detractors and defenders ultimately created mere caricatures of these works. It is also obsolete, because once both sides of the argument exposed the multilayered contexts of these works, we can weigh the information they contain more rigorously, "against the grain" when necessary, and always balanced with information from other sources.[22] Detailed evaluations of other sources, especially the archival spy reports, will be made in the relevant places throughout this study. Such evaluations will include contextualizing that material in the history of Egyptian state surveillance, and in the context of state-society relations.

Visual evidence is one unique source of information used in this study. Most of it comes from photographic postcards of coffeehouses in Cairo, found in the Max Karkegi

---

[21] For the treatment of newspapers in Egypt and the Arab Middle East, see: Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). On the use of memoirs, see: Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*; Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied.* On the use of advertising, see: Mona Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863-1922*, 1st edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[22] Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Nattali and Bond, [1836]), in two volumes; *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne*, 2nd edition (Paris: Panckoucke, 1829), vol. 18; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1st edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jason Thompson, "Edward William Lane in Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997): 243-61; Anne Godlewska, "Map, Text and Image. The Mentality of Enlightened Conquerors: A New Look at the Description de l'Egypte," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20/1 (1995): 5-28.

Collection at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.[23] Most of the postcards are probably from the late nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, and they are of the *Street Scenes* type of photographs popular with British, French, and German speaking tourists and travelers. Some are colorized versions of black and white photographs. Although there are a few photographs of "coffeehouse scenes" that were clearly staged in a studio, most of the photographs in the postcards, and all of those used in this study, were taken on location. The people in the photographs had to be posed, due to the available technology at the time that demanded long exposures for the camera. They were usually posed either facing the camera, sometimes looking directly at it, or facing each other, with their profile to the camera. They were posed either drinking coffee, smoking the waterpipe, or playing a board game. Thus, they created a certain genre of coffeehouse photographs. A bit later in the twentieth century, coffeehouse patrons, especially effendis, were photographed striking poses from a well-known repertoire of effendi performative acts, such as having their shoes shined at the coffeehouse, reading the newspapers there, drinking coffee or smoking the waterpipe. Nevertheless, with a couple of notable exceptions, most photographs in this study will be analyzed for the physical features of the place itself, such as furniture and architecture.[24]

---

[23] For the archival details of this collection, see: http://defter.fr/index.php/collection-max-karkegi. Not all the material in this collection is catalogued at the time of writing: I am grateful for the librarians at the Département des Estampes et de la photographie for making the material still under process available to me.

[24] For the use of photographic evidence as a historical source, see: Penny Tinkler, *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research* (London: Sage, 2013); Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860-1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Zeynep Çelik and Edhem Eldem (eds.), *Camera Ottomana: Photography and Modernity in the Ottoman Empire, 1840-1914*, trans. Hande Eagle, 1st edition (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2015).

Another unique source, but one used only in a limited way in this study, is interviews. In early 2016, I interviewed Franco Groppi in Geneva, the fourth and last generation of the Groppi family who owned and operated the famous *Groppi* establishment in Cairo. The subject of the interview was the business history of *Groppi*, but since this aspect of coffeehouse history lies largely outside the parameters of the present study, I use only parts of it here, and with other evidence as well, in order to highlight the social background of some coffeehouse owners who came to Egypt from Europe. In late 2015, I also interviewed a dozen or so Egyptian Jews in Tel Aviv, who remember Cairo in the 1940s, in an attempt to determine if there were coffeehouses that were associated with certain religious or ethnic groups, "Jewish coffeehouses" of sorts.[25] These interviews helped to determine that with the notable exception of "Greek coffeehouses," especially in Alexandria, coffeehouses in Egypt were not usually associated with any religious or ethnic group, but rather with overall style ("European" or "Local," "modern" or "old"), and most importantly, with social class. Since the time period discussed in these interviews also lies outside the limits of this study, they will be used here only in a cursory way, to add some anthropological weight to conclusions about the social hierarchy of coffeehouses.

This wealth of textual and non-textual sources offers an opportunity to reconstruct a richer, more integrated and nuanced history of Cairo's coffeehouses, without privileging one source, such as newspapers, over another, with the result of distorting our point of view, despite our best hermeneutic efforts. As literary theorist Sharon Spencer posited in her study of the modern Western novel, multiple points of view of the same

---

[25] See: Pinsker, *A Rich Brew*, for a study on "Jewish coffeehouses" in Europe and the United States.

space yield a more complete and holistic understanding of that space than a single point of view of it.[26] Taking a cue from this literary theory, the present study tries to integrate the different points of view obtained from different sources into a coherent and cogent historical narrative. Thus, descriptions and various surveys of Cairo, statistical data, newspaper articles and advertisement, visual material and oral history, will tell the urban and social history of Cairo's coffeehouses in the first two chapters. In the last two chapters, spy reports from the archives, together with memoirs of coffeehouse patrons, will tell the story of how Cairo's coffeehouses became so important to the development of the Egyptian public sphere and mass politics. For not privileging a certain type of source over another does not mean that certain sources cannot be more useful than others in highlighting particular facets of the overall story, and it does not mean losing sight of their origins and the ways that they both offer and elide information.

Chapter Outline

The plan for chapters is as follows. Chapter 1 will trace the *longue durée* history of Cairo's coffeehouses from their emergence in the sixteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. It will explore the historical context behind the emergence of coffee-drinking as a social habit, Ottoman attitudes towards coffeehouses, their numbers and location throughout Cairo, their architecture, layout, and material culture, the social makeup of their owners and clientele, foodways, and the leisure and entertainment cultures associated with them. This chapter will highlight the fact that Cairo's

---

[26] Sharon Spencer, *Space, Time, and Structure in the Modern Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1971).

coffeehouses largely catered to the city's poorer classes, which helps explain their popularity, the kind of leisure and entertainment prevalent in them, and most importantly, their gender dynamics.

Chapter 2 will follow that discussion from the mid-nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth. It will discuss in depth the nature of the significant urban growth that Cairo experienced at that time, and the impact that an influx of immigrants to the city, from overseas and from rural Egypt, made on its landscape, and on its coffeehouses. It will compare the new coffeehouses to the existing ones, in terms of numbers, location, architecture and layout, foodways, and class makeup of owners and clientele. In particular, it will focus on the intersections of social hierarchy, so-called Europeanization, and the changing gender dynamics of public spaces, that the new coffeehouses fostered.

Chapter 3 will discuss the place of coffeehouses in the political public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century. Conversing with Habermas' theories of the public sphere, and using state surveillance records on coffeehouses, it will show how they became a go-to place for politically involved social groups to discuss politics, and in turn helped to galvanize the political awareness of their patrons. It will pay special attention to the connections of coffeehouses to other places where politics were debated, across the city, and across the social hierarchy.

Finally, chapter 4 will trace the role of Cairo's coffeehouses in the mass politics of Egyptian nationalism during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Using both Egyptian and British surveillance records this time, this chapter will consider the turn of

the Egyptian nationalist movement to mass protest, culminating in the *1919 Revolution*, and how coffeehouses served as loci for the mobilization of the protests. Echoing the previous chapter, it will also tease out the connections between coffeehouses and other places of mobilization, and how they worked together as complimenting parts of the social networks that made up the Egyptian public sphere.

Chapter 1:

Coffeehouses in Ottoman Cairo, 16th to Mid-19th Century

Introduction

Coffee as a beverage was introduced to the Middle East from the southern region of what is Ethiopia today in the fifteenth century. By the end of the next century it was entrenched as a social habit. Coffee was consumed at home with family, offered to guests, drank in bathhouses, shops, Sufi ceremonies, religious festivals, weddings, and funerals. This chapter, however, will explore only its consumption in coffeehouses, a social – and physical – institution created, ostensibly, solely for that purpose. It will examine the *longue durée* history of coffee and coffeehouses from the sixteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, focusing on the coffeehouses of Cairo. In that framework, it will consider the forces of global trade, local economics, and social circumstances that gave rise to Cairo's coffeehouse scene, and then will delve more deeply into examining the development of Ottoman coffeehouse there. It will explore the urban history and design of those coffeehouses, the social circumstances of their clientele and owners, and the habits of sociability, consumption, leisure and entertainment they engendered.

Beginnings

Coffee, Global Trade, and Coffeehouses

Scholarly consensus has it that the use of coffee, both as food and drink, crossed the Red Sea from the southern regions of Ethiopia to the Yemen sometime in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Sixteenth century historians, writing in Arabic or in Ottoman Turkish, attributed the cross-over to Yemenite Sufis, especially of the *al-Shādhiliyyah* Order, who used coffee as a stimulant in their all-night religious rituals.[27] Coffee-drinking at that time was a communal affair, drinking, as it was, from a communal bowl which was passed around in a circle of men, much in the manner of wine-drinking – thus setting the scene for a long and convoluted association between coffee and wine. That gradually changed during the fifteenth century to individual consumption in small cups, which allowed the emergence of both the coffeehouse, and coffee-drinking at home.[28] From the Yemenite port cities of Aden (ʿAdan) and Mocha (al-Mukhā), coffee-drinking spread to Mecca, Cairo, Damascus, and Istanbul, in that order, during the first half of the sixteenth century. By the end of that century, coffee-drinking reached beyond the Ottoman Empire to Iran, India, and possibly Sumatra. A century later, in the second half of the seventeenth

---

[27] "Shādhiliyyah" is to this day another word for coffee in North Africa, where that order has been historically strong: Dalenda Larguèche, "Le café à Tunis du XVIII au XIX siècle: Produit de commerce et espace de sociabilité," in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 182. Some scholars, however, while not refuting it, argued that the association between Sufis and coffee had been somewhat exaggerated: Éric Geoffroy, "La diffusion du café au Proche-Orient arabe par l'intermédiaire des soufis: mythe et réalité," in Tuchscherer, *Le commerce du café*, 7-17.

[28] See: Edward J. Keall, "The Evolution of the first Coffee Cups in Yemen," in Tuchscherer, *Le commerce du café*, 35-51.

century, coffee found a new market in Europe, so by the first quarter of the eighteenth-century Yemen already lost its global monopoly on the cultivation of coffee to European colonial plantations in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.[29]

Coffee-drinking reached Cairo at the turn of the sixteenth century by way of Yemenite students, probably Sufis, in al-ʾAzhar. It spread in Sufi and non-Sufi circles in the city, and the first coffee-houses (*buyūt al-qahwah*) were established there. Note that this kind of place was referred to in Arabic documents from sixteenth to eighteenth centuries Egypt as a "coffee-house" – and in Damascus as a "coffee-shop" (*dukkān al-qahwah*, or *ḥānūt al-qahwah*) – as in current English usage. Only later, and probably not before the eighteenth century, did the place become synonymous with the drink in spoken Arabic ("qahwah," for both; but "maqha" for coffeehouse in literary Arabic), as in many Latin languages.[30] Perhaps the change was influenced by European travelers in Egypt, who were using the same word (café) for both drink and place.

Despite their gradually growing popularity throughout the 1500s, coffee-drinking and coffeehouses in Cairo spread beyond narrow circles of enthusiasts only towards the end of that century. This new phase was enabled by wide-ranging changes in the supply and trade of coffee. Until the mid-1500s, the supply of coffee relied almost exclusively on the wild-growing *coffea* plants in southern Ethiopia. Only the husk of the coffee bean (*qishr*) was used at that time to produce a much lighter brew than the one which is widely known today. From the middle of the sixteenth century onward, *coffea* was commercially cultivated in Yemen, as a replacement for the cultivation of the local *qāt*, making Yemen

---

[29] Michel Tuchscherer, "Commerce et production du café en mer Rouge au XVI siècle," in Tuchscherer, *Le commerce du café*, 69-90.
[30] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 108.

a global monopoly for the manufacture and export of coffee beans, both whole (*bunn jafal*) and unhusked (*bunn qalb*).[31]

Cairo's merchants were connected to the sea ports of Yemen for a long time, importing spices, especially pepper, from India and further off in Asia. During the sixteenth century, Europeans, first the Portuguese, and later the Dutch and the English, increasingly intervened in the spice trade, and succeeded in shipping growing quantities of spices from Asia to Europe through the Atlantic route, which created competition with the Red Sea one. By the end of the century, this competition created shortages of supply and fluctuations of prices in the spice trade in Cairo, pushing its merchants to take advantage of the increasing availability, as well as good and stable prices, of Yemenite coffee. In fact, during the seventeenth century, Cairo became the main distribution point, globally, for Yemenite coffee. Its big merchants imported it from Mocha, and exported it to the growing markets in the Ottoman Empire and Europe, making themselves a fortune.[32] Even after colonial plantations took the global lead as the main source of coffee, Cairo continued to hold its position as an important distribution point of coffee to the Ottoman Empire and around the Mediterranean, up until the twentieth century.[33] Crucially for the development of the coffeehouse scene in Cairo, its rich coffee merchants, now possessing large quantities of coffee, supported and promoted the

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.; Nelly Hanna, "Coffee and Coffee Merchants in Cairo 1580-1630" in Tuchscherer, *Le commerce du café*, 91-101; André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle,* vol. 1 (Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, 1973), 307-72.

[33] Eyal Ginio, "When Coffee Brought about Wealth and Prestige: The Impact of Egyptian Trade on Salonica," *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, 86/1 (2006), 93-107.

coffeehouse business by selling the coffee to – usually poor – coffeehouse owners on credit.[34]

The First Coffeehouses in Cairo: A Low-Class Success Story

The well-known Ottoman historian, poet, and writer, Mustafa Ali (1541-1600), left us a description of Cairo in 1599, in which he commented on "the concentration of coffee-houses at every step, and of perfect places where people can assemble."[35] His early description of Cairo's coffeehouses, from the time of their ascendance, focused on their clientele: he differentiated between several groups of men who patronized coffeehouses, but in his judgment, they were all poor, even "dissolute." Some were so poor, that they had to rely on coffee for drink, and roasted coffee beans and a couple of biscuits for solid food.[36] This is very early evidence for a feature of coffeehouses that has lasted ever since: coffeehouses have been providing affordable nourishment for the very poor, many of whom relied on them for their daily sustenance. This can explain the mass appeal of coffeehouses. Other coffeehouse patrons, Mustafa Ali wrote, were simple pious Muslims, early-risers, who regularly opened their day with an invigorating cup of coffee at the coffeehouse before continuing to the mosque for their day of worship.[37]

But most of the patrons of Cairo's coffeehouses, wrote Mustafa Ali, were "dissolute" men: opium-eaters and drug-users "of the slave class," ignorant madmen, who hung around coffeehouses all day long. Mustafa Ali paid special attention to the

---

[34] Hanna, "Coffee and Coffee Merchants," 96.
[35] Andreas Tietze, *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī's Description of Cairo of 1599: Text, Transliteration, Translation, Notes* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien, 1975), 37.
[36] Tietze, *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī*, 33.
[37] Tietze, *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī*, 37.

Ottoman soldiers who used to occupy many of the coffeehouses. This was part of a wider phenomenon that spread in Ottoman urban centers: that of Ottoman soldiers not only being prominent among coffeehouse clientele, but also owning, renting, or operating many of the coffeehouses as a side-job to supplement their poor income. This was not only the case in Cairo, but also in small towns such as the Delta village of Rosette,[38] in Ottoman Tunis, where many coffeehouses in the center of the city were opened by Ottoman, non-indigenous, soldiers and administrators,[39] and in Istanbul. In the latter, whole regiments of Janissaries – who had once been members of an elite infantry corps, but whose ranks by the eighteenth century had fallen on hard times – used coffeehouses as a place of living, and as a place to make a living, not only by operating them, but also by using them to launch their extortive activities. Janissaries even used coffeehouses as their regimental headquarters, as informal police stations, or for staging uprisings against the Sultan, such as the famous Patrona Halil Rebellion in 1730.[40]

However, the Ottoman soldiers who occupied Cairo's coffeehouses in 1599 were, according to Mustafa Ali, poor, boorish "hillbillies" from the Black Sea region, veteran or old officers, not worthy of their rank, who used to smoke "grass," and falsely boast about their past glories. They were very keen on "showing their grandiosity to the common people," always leaving change when paying for their coffee, and making a big

---

[38] Muḥammad Ḥusām al-Dīn Ismāʿil, "Le café dans la ville de Rosette à l'époque ottomane XVI-XVII siècle," in Tuchscherer, *Le commerce du café*, 104-5.

[39] Larguèche, "Le café à Tunis," 186-9.

[40] Ali Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul" in Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2007), 117-32. See also: Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). On the Patrona Halil Rebellion, see: Münir Aktepe, *Patrona Isyani, 1730* [The Patrona Rebellion, 1730] (Istanbul : Edebiyat Fakültesi Basimevi, 1958); Robert W, Olson, "The Esnaf and the Patrona Halil Rebellion of 1730: A Realignment in Ottoman Politics?," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17/3 (Sep., 1974), 329-44.

deal out of inviting each other to a cheap cup of coffee.[41] Once again, it seems that from very early on, coffeehouses provided a space for the performance of hyper-masculinity, fueled by anxieties about poverty and class: these petty officers were so poor, that they could not afford to show themselves in court in an acceptable (high-class) manner, and when they could, they overdid it.[42] "[S]howing their grandiosity to the common people" where they could afford to do so, in a cheap coffeehouse, was a way to compensate for their lack of means and class. At the same time, it was a way to differentiate themselves from other coffeehouse patrons of the same economic means, and to lay claim to, or reify and reinforce, a higher station on the social hierarchy.

In a more prescriptive treatise from the same time, Mustafa Ali put into clear words why coffeehouses around the Ottoman Empire, a relatively recent phenomenon, were so successful with various groups of people: "poor people go there because they have no home or shelter. For indeed the poor have neither cash nor worldly goods enabling them to gather anywhere else." For their part, "dervishes and gnostics" go there "to see one another and engage in conversation." The "town hooligans" and soldiers go to coffeehouses "for the purpose of spreading malicious gossip and perpetrating evil acts." Sufis go there because their masters, especially al-Shādhilī, took a liking for coffee; and some "captives of companionship" frequent coffeehouses because they are "men who love to sit and talk with their friends for hours on end."[43]

---

[41] Tietze, *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī*, 37-8, 53.
[42] Tietze, *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī*, 52-3.
[43] Douglas S. Brookes (trans.), *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Âli's: Mevāʾidün-Nefāʾis Fī Ḳavaʿidiʾl-Mecālis: "Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings"*, Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 59 (Harvard: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 2003), 129-30.

What this description and reasoning make very clear is the novel kind of sociability that coffeehouses offered. People of means, who had large enough houses, villas, or palaces, entertained at home. For those who did not have the means or the space to entertain at home, the opportunities for socializing were limited to spaces that were either inflected by other purposes, such as the mosque, the market, and the bathhouse, or otherwise were places of ill-repute, such as taverns serving alcohol.[44] By providing an option for ordinary Cairenes to socialize, coffeehouses fundamentally changed the social scene, and the urban landscape.

The novelty of this mode of sociability caused some alarm with authorities and high-class moralists. As Ralph Hattox showed, Muslim judges, jurists, and medical professionals first set out to investigate whether the new beverage of coffee was intoxicating, like the Quranically-forbidden alcohol. When that was quickly disproven, the detractors of coffee and coffeehouses criticized them on the basis of their patrons' activities, which reminded them too much of taverns.[45] Nevertheless, without the harsh social stigma associated with alcohol, Hattox argued, coffeehouses could boom.[46] Perhaps the move to drinking coffee out of small cups instead of communal bowls also had something to do with the wish of coffeehouse patrons to disassociate themselves from wine and taverns, and to add to the respectability of coffeehouses. I also propose that the very novelty of the sociability that coffeehouses offered, especially for the lower

---

[44] Alcohol was formally forbidden and actively discouraged by Islamic authorities, legalists, and moralists. It did little to stem alcohol consumption or taverns, but it did strongly mark them, and their patrons, as disreputable.

[45] Coffeehouses also had some defenders. Mustafa Ali explicitly argued that the good pious Muslims who frequented coffeehouses as well, were their redeeming quality. Tietze, *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī*, 37.

[46] Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985).

classes, was another cause for anxiety among the higher classes around the new establishment. One can grasp that novelty from Mustafa Ali's explicit descriptions of coffeehouse patrons as "captives of companionship," and "men who love to sit and talk with their friends for hours on end."

The early association of coffeehouses with the poor classes might have caused a delay in their adoption by the higher classes. As Nelly Hanna pointed out, it was only in the early decades of the seventeenth century that coffeehouses were built by the elite coffee merchants in Cairo as part of their new *wikālah*-s (commercial complexes, malls). These coffeehouses, right in the commercial center of Cairo, probably attracted a more affluent clientele of artisans and traders, and helped coffeehouses in general to gain more respectability.[47] By the turn of the nineteenth century, one could even find a "Turk courtier" sitting in a coffeehouse, enjoying his coffee and pipe.[48] Thus, one can argue that the social institution of coffeehouses in Cairo spread "from the bottom up," from a lower class institution, to a middle-class one. This is in contradistinction to the usual narrative about the spread of coffee-drinking and coffeehouses in England and Europe, which described them as spreading from a small circle of elite enthusiasts for exotic curiosities – the (English) *virtuosi*, as Brian Cowan called them – down the social hierarchy to the middle and lower classes.[49]

---

[47] Hanna, "Coffee and Coffee Merchants," 95.

[48] De Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs des habitants modernes de l'Égypte" in *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Panckoucke, 1826), vol. 18, bk. 1, 131-2.

[49] Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*.

Coffeehouses in Ottoman Cairo by the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Several travel accounts, by both European and Ottoman travelers, as well as some court documents and registries from Ottoman Cairo, shed some light on the *longue durée* cultural and social history of the city's coffeehouses during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The encyclopedic *Description de l'Égypte*, compiled by French researchers during the French occupation of Egypt (1798-1801), as well as the British scholar's, Edward William Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (written in 1825-8 and 1833-5), complete that picture well into the nineteenth century.

Numbers

Numbers are notoriously hard to combine, not only in terms of availability, but also in terms of reliability: they depend on what was counted as a coffeehouse, and on how well were they counted. Famous Ottoman traveler, Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682), who travelled in Egypt between 1672 and 1680, estimated the number of coffeehouses in Cairo to be 643.[50] At the turn of the nineteenth century, different French researchers gave slightly different numbers in the *Description de l'Égypte*: Chabrol stated in one place that there were 1350 coffeehouses altogether in Cairo,[51] but in another place counted 2000 coffeehouse owners/operators;[52] Jomard, however, estimated that at the time of the French occupation there were between 1400 and 1500 coffeehouses in Cairo, while in

---

[50] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 92.
[51] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 158.
[52] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 9.

1818 there were only 1170 coffeehouses.[53] Lane gauged their number to be "above a thousand."[54] Finally, famous education and public works minister, Ali Mubarak (1823-1893), in his equally famous survey of Cairo, gave the number of coffeehouses registered with the municipal authorities of Cairo in 1881 as 1067 total.[55]

But the numbers of coffeehouses might have been even higher. In his digitization project of the 1848 and 1868 Egyptian national censuses, economic historian Mohamed Saleh found 79 entries for the profession of *qahwajī*, a coffeehouse owner/operator, in his sample of the 1848 census, and 167 such entries in his sample of the 1868 census. At a sampling rate of 8% to 10%, then by extrapolation, we can estimate the number of *qahwajī*-s in 1848 Cairo to be between 800 and 1000, and their number in 1868 Cairo to be between 1670 and 2087. Not all those recorded as *qahwajī*-s in the two censuses owned or operated their own coffeehouse: some, especially children, probably worked in another *qahwajī*'s coffeehouse. However, since these cases were relatively few, and the censuses did survey household units (see below), these numbers might give us another approximate clue as to the number of coffeehouses in Cairo in the middle of the nineteenth century.[56]

---

[53] Jomard, "Description de la ville et de la citadelle du Kaire" in *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Panckoucke, 1829), vol. 18, bk. 2, 128.

[54] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 37.

[55] ʿAlī Mubārak, *Al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyyah al-Jadīdah li-Maṣr al-Qāhirah wa-Mudunihā wa-Bilādihā al-Qadīmah wal-Shahīrah* [Tawfīq's New Plans for Cairo and its Ancient and Famous Towns and Environs], 1st ed. (Būlāq, Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubra al-ʾAmīriyyah, 1888), vol. 1, 95.

[56] On Mohamed Saleh's digitization project of the 1848 and 1868 Egyptian censuses, see: Mohamed Saleh, "A Pre-Colonial Population Brought to Light: Digitization of the Nineteenth Century Egyptian Censuses," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 46/1 (2013): 5-18. I am deeply indebted to Professor Saleh for sharing his sample data on Cairo's *qahwajī*-s with me. To my knowledge, the complete data sets from this project were planned to be publicly released with the North Atlantic Population Project (NAPP), https://www.nappdata.org/napp/intro.shtml . On the censuses, see also: Ghislaine Alleaume and Philippe Fargues, "La naissance d'une statistique d'État: Le recensement de 1848 en Egypte," *Histoire & Mesure* 13/1-2 (1998): 147-93; Kenneth M. Cuno and Michael J. Reimer,

It may very well be the case that, as Tuchscherer asserted, none of these numbers has any real statistical value, other than to say that coffeehouses were ubiquitous in Cairo.[57] However, municipal records and population censuses generally tend to be more reliable statistical sources than other estimations. The differences in numbers might be explained not only by the different survey methods of each source, but also by fluctuations in the city's population – urban growth rates are rarely a linear affair – and more so, by changing economic conditions and business environments that might have affected, in particular, small businesses such as coffeehouses.

Location

Coffeehouses spread throughout all the sub-districts of Cairo. Their distribution, however, varied greatly between them. Chabrol estimated, in the early nineteenth century, that "the city of Cairo" contained approximately 1200 coffeehouses, Ancient Cairo about 50, and Būlāq, then Cairo's port on the Nile, about another hundred.[58]

"The Census Registers of Nineteenth-Century Egypt: A New Source for Social Historians," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24 (1997): 193-216.

[57] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 92.

[58] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 158.
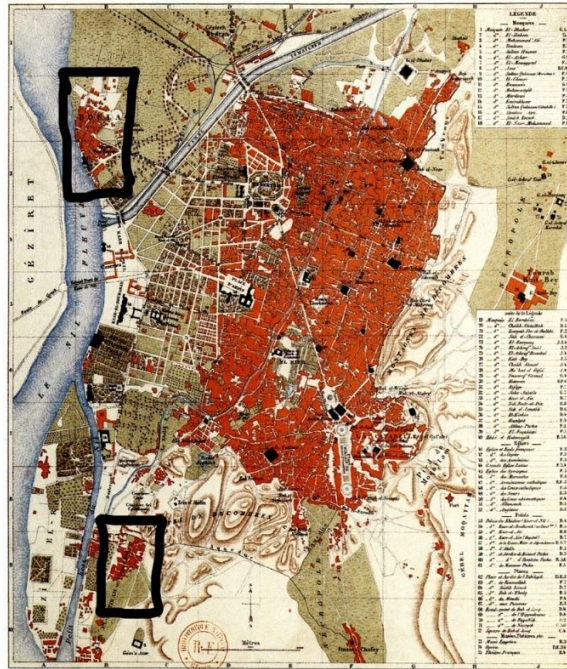
Map 1. An 1888 general map of Cairo. The brown mass is the built area of the Mamluk-Ottoman city. To its north-west along the Nile, framed in black, is Būlāq. To its south-west along the Nile, framed in black, is Ancient Cairo.

L. Thuillier, 1888, *Le Caire, Itinerare de l'Orient, Egypt* [Map, modified to show Būlāq and Ancient Cairo], Paris Hachette

Court documents from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries indicate that most coffeehouses tended to be opened in or near *wikālah*-s, other small shops, near mosques, or in *rab'*-s, those multi-story, multi-apartment complexes so unique to Cairo, and so common there. Very few coffeehouses were opened in purely residential areas (*ḥārah*-s): that seems to had been a nineteenth-twentieth century phenomenon.[59] Ali Mubarak too listed coffeehouses along with wine-taverns, *būza*-taverns,[60] perfumeries, silk shops, oil shops, cloths shops, and animal food shops.[61] Moreover, evidence from around the Ottoman Empire shows that sometimes coffeehouses doubled as shops, especially barbershops: men could get a haircut and a shave in a coffeehouse;[62] and vice versa, when Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) routed the Janissaries in 1826, he once again closed many of their coffeehouses – however, many barbershops began to surreptitiously serve coffee in the back of their shops.[63]

The physical proximity of coffeehouses to, and connections with, other commercial establishments, or commercial activity, emphasize their public nature. Historian Alan Mikhail's argument that "Ottoman urban neighborhood café[s]" were experienced by their patrons as an extension of their private homes[64] might have been true for those coffeehouses opened in *rab'*-s, or later on – later than he suggested – inside very small residential alleys. All other coffeehouses were squarely a part of public space,

---

[59] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 108-9.

[60] *Būza* was a cheap alcoholic drink made from fermented barely. It was particularly associated with the poorest and lowest of the urban classes.

[61] ʿAlī Mubārak, *Al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyyah*, vol. 1, 95.

[62] Hélène Desmet-Grégoire, *Les objets du café dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient & de la Méditerranée* (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1989), 114, 117.

[63] François Georgeon, "Les cafés à Istanbul à la fin de l'Empire ottoman" in Desmet-Grégoire and Georgeon, *Cafés d'Orient revisités*, 41.

[64] Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire: Gender, Urban Space and the Ottoman Coffee House," in Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

or, at most, marked the border between public areas of the city and more private, residential, ones.[65] Coffeehouses were also understood by Ottomans to be public places. Contrary to Mikhail's assertion that "[w]e do not know what kinds of spaces were thought of as 'public' or 'private'"[66] by early modern Ottomans, writer Mustafa Ali, whose same work Mikhail cited, had penned a whole passage titled "The Categories of Public Places and the Infinite Number of Private Quarters." In it, he elucidated the determining factor in considering a place to be public or private: a private quarter was a place where one needed permission from someone else to enter or leave, and a public place was a space where one did not need such permission. Therefore, public and private spaces could coexist in the same place: for example, "the chambers of worship" in mosques were public, but "the private galleries" of the Sultan and the nobles in those same mosques were not. Coffeehouses, according to Mustafa Ali, were, of course, a very public place.[67]

The Qahwājī-s

According to evidence from the sixteenth century through at least the late 1860s, coffeehouse owners (*qahwājī*) were usually of the poorer classes, with a preponderance of soldiers or ex-soldiers looking for some extra income. Nevertheless, they were loosely organized in tax-paying guilds. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, for example,

---

[65] Jean-Charles Depaule, "Les établissements de café du Caire," *Études rurales*, 180 (Jul. - Dec., 2007), 254-5.

[66] Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 134.

[67] *The Ottoman Gentleman*, 142-3. Some residents of Istanbul at the turn of the seventeenth century even actively objected to the opening of coffeehouses in their residential area: Selma Özkoçak, "Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History*, 33 (2007), 971-3.

Cairo's coffeehouses were under the direct supervision of an intendant, usually a Janissari officer, who bought his position from the government. Each coffeehouse paid him a small annual tax that ranged from 10 to 40 *para* – the second smallest Ottoman denomination – and the poorest ones were exempt. They needed his authorization to light fire, and he was also in charge of keeping public order in coffeehouses.[68] The existence of *qahwājī* guilds is attested to also in the 1848 and the 1868 censuses, which mentioned a *shaykh al-qahwājiyyah* (head of the *qahwājī*-s), and a *qahwājī-bāshā* (head-*qahwājī*), respectively.[69]

Samples of both censuses can also suggest a general profile of Cairo's *qahwājī*-s. Almost all of them were men: there is only one female *qahwājiyyah* mentioned in the 1848 sample, out of 79 *qahwājī*-s (sampling rate is 8%-10%). She was a 35-year-old woman called Ḥijāziyah bint Ali, an Egyptian Muslim, who lived in a poor dwelling at Ḥārah Dāwūd al-Naḥās no. 5, together with 35-year-old Muhammad al-Jallād bin Yūsuf, and his 20-year-old son, Suleiman, both *qahwājī*-s as well. The 1868 sample also mentioned one female *qahwājīyyah* (out of 167 *qahwājī*-s), the 12-year-old daughter of a 30-year-old *qahwājī* called Muhammad bin Ali al-Qāḍī, who both lived in al-Dāwūdī al-Kabīr Alley no. 86.[70]

The general age range of *qahwājī*-s in both samples was mostly between 20 and 50 years old. A few children (usually, but not always, noted as *ṣabiyy qahwājī*, a young *qahwājī*), aged 6, 8, and 10, were also listed, as well as a few young males aged 12, and a few older males in their 50s and 60s. This means that Cairo's *qahwājī*-s in mid-

---

[68] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 160.
[69] Meta-Data samples of the 1848 and 1868 Egyptian censuses, courtesy of Dr. Mohamed Saleh.
[70] Ibid.

nineteenth century were squarely of working age, but generally not too young. Moreover, the trade ran in some families, as young boys (and girls) were permanently employed in the family's coffeehouse.[71]

All *qahwājī*-s in both samples were legally free people (*ḥurr*, as in not enslaved), except for 30-year-old Abdallah al-ʿAbd, of "black" ethnicity and unspecified religion, who was recorded in 1868. A few *qahwājī*-s were dependents (*tābiʿ*) of either people of legal age, in case of minors, or of other powerful people, such as 30-year-old Yūsuf Ali, who was a dependent of Ali Bey, the governor of Dumyāṭ in 1848. All *qahwājī*-s in both samples were also able-bodied (*salīm*), which is significant considering the high rates of disabilities at the time.[72]

The vast majority of *qahwājī*-s were Egyptian subjects ("in the government's care," *dākhil riʿāyah al-ḥukūmah*, as the Ottoman parlance of the censuses went): only 5 *qahwājī*-s out of the 79 sampled in 1848 (6.3%) were foreign subjects, and only 12 *qahwājī*-s out of 167 (7.1%) in 1868 were foreign subjects. Most of the foreigners in both samples were listed as ethnic Turks: in 1848, 4 out of the 5 foreigners were Turks (and the other one was a *Shāmī*), while in 1868, there was more diversity, as we also find Italian and Greek subjects, an Urfalī, a Rūmalī-Turk, a Black Albanian, and even an Indian – an indication of the growing immigration into Egypt that started around that time.[73]

Most *qahwājī*-s in both samples were recorded as Muslims, although in 1868, there was a little more diversity in that aspect as well. In the sample from that census, we

---

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

encounter, for example, Najūr al-Dabbāḥ, a Jew under Italian "protection" (ḥimāyah, referring to the Capitulations regime), who lived in the Jewish Quarter (ḥārah al-yahūd al-rabāniyyīn, that is, non-Karaites Jews). We also meet Alex Karahmaḥās, a Greek "non-Muslim," who was a qahwājī on Mūskī street or neighborhood (known to be a neighborhood of foreigners), but in 1868 was listed as unemployed.[74]

Finally, the low socio-economic status of the qahwājī-s might be demonstrated by the fact that all those sampled lived in poor, low-status dwellings or rab'-s, usually in private ownership of others (many of whom were women). Only few qahwājī-s could afford to own the poor dwelling in which they lived: 12 qahwājī-s out of the 79 sampled in 1848 (15.2%) did, and only 10 qahwājī-s out of the 167 sampled in 1868 (5.9%) owned the house they lived in. Coffeehouses, it should be noted, were a very cheap business: at the turn of the nineteenth century, renting a fully furnished coffeehouse was estimated at 7 to 15 para a day; and the cost of buying one, furnishing and operating it was very low as well.[75]

How did an Ottoman Coffeehouse in Cairo look like?

Coffeehouses varied in size and opulence. On the one end of the scale, one did not need to have a "house" at all in order to prepare and sell coffee: the phenomenon of cooking hot food and beverages on portable stoves, carried around either on one's body or on wheels, was attested to by European travelers in Cairo from at least the fifteenth

---

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid. ; Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 162-3n.1

century.[76] Thus, many mobile coffee sellers roamed the streets of Cairo, especially the markets, or had a sales-trolley around which customers gathered, standing or sitting.

On the other end of the scale, there were some luxurious coffeehouses in the main cities of the Ottoman Empire. European travelers in the early nineteenth century described such places in Istanbul, and especially in Damascus and Aleppo. These coffeehouses were very sizable, and could reportedly entertain hundreds of people. Those in Damascus, for example, were built of white stone or marble, and had a vault supported by columns. Round divans were placed between the columns, and raised stone platforms, or benches (*maṣṭabah*), ran along the walls of the room. The divans and the platforms were covered by elegant rugs or mats, and sometimes cushions, on which the patrons sat. High-rank patrons sat on especially elegant divans in the center of the room. Water basins were scattered around, which were surrounded by pipes in a crown shape. Some coffeehouses had a fountain in the middle of the room. The coffee itself was prepared in a large niche.[77]

---

[76] Desmet-Grégoire, *Les objets du café*, 113.
[77] Brigitte Marino, "Cafés et cafetiers de Damas aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 75-76 (1995), 281-2.

Figure 1. Coffeehouses in Istanbul could be quite opulent (although this painting of a Rococo style coffeehouse, included in Revd. Robert Walsh's travel account of Constantinople, might be exaggerated). Notice the fountain with the pipes arranged around it like a crown, the *maṣṭabah*-s, and the musicians.

Interior of a Turkish Coffee House, Constantinople, Watercolor by Thomas Allom, 1838.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

As for their location, these luxurious coffeehouses were located on the banks of an important body of water, such as the Bosporus in Istanbul, or the Barada River in Damascus. They could also be found in nature (taming and enjoying the great outdoors, or picnicking in public gardens, was also a relatively recent, early modern, phenomenon). Conversely, coffeehouses were opened in the most important *wikālah*-s.[78] Not surprisingly, this kind of opulent, early nineteenth-century coffeehouses in Damascus were patronized, according to European travelers, by the city's notables, dressed in long crimson pelisses, carrying diamond-encrusted daggers, and followed by a retinue of servants.[79]

---

[78] Marino, "Cafés et cafetiers de Damas," 277-9; Özkoçak, "Coffeehouses," 965-86.
[79] Marino, "Cafés et cafetiers de Damas," 282-4.

Figure 2. A more modest, but still elegant, coffeehouse in Istanbul, c. 1809. Notice the wooden *maṣṭabah*-s, with the better seats in the back, and the smoking of the pipes.

Scene in a Kahvehane or Coffee House, Water- and bodycolor by an anonymous Greek artist, c. 1809.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 3. Another modest, but still elegant, coffeehouse in Istanbul, 1854. Notice the stone *maṣṭabah*-s, and the same general layout, with the water fountain, and the better seats, for more important people in the back. Also note the cheap pipes (called çibuk), and the young black waiter carrying a better narjīlah. Note the two women at the door, apparently leaving, and the two musicians on the left.

A Turkish Coffee-House, Constantinople, Watercolor by Amadeo, 5th Count Preziosi, 1854.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Similar descriptions of coffeehouses are, however, wanting, when it comes to Cairo before the mid-nineteenth century. Surely, there were bigger, more expensive, and more elegant coffeehouses than others, but most were described as being rather drab, and

associated with the lower classes. As noted above, already in the seventeenth century rich coffee merchants built coffeehouses in their important *wikālah*-s: such was the coffeehouse built by Ismail Abu Ṭāqiyyah, the head of the merchants' guild (*shāhbandar al-tujjār*) and Abd al-Qādir al-Damīrī, in their large *wikālah*, right in the commercial heart of Cairo. A coffeehouse in such a busy location must have attracted a more affluent crowd of merchants and artisans.[80] But even as late as the 1830s, Lane could assert that coffeehouses were frequented "by few excepting persons of the lower orders, and tradesmen."[81]

Seventeenth and eighteenth century court records, as well as the early nineteenth century European descriptions, agree that most Cairene coffeehouses were rather modest. If numbers of coffee cups can attest to the size of a certain coffeehouse, then some of their inventories found in court records indicate that they had anywhere between 30 to 210 coffee cups, or 90 cups on average. Coffeehouses in markets or commercial areas were usually converted shops, not any different from their adjacent shops: a vaulted one room, of 2 to 4 meters in depth, and 1.5 meters in width, with a sole opening to the street, made of wooden work.[82] According to the *Description de l'Égypte*, a more popular coffeehouse at the turn of the nineteenth century could entertain between 200 and 250 customers throughout the day.[83]

As for the arrangement of their space, their design was similar to that of their upscale counterparts in other Ottoman cities: both the *Description de l'Égypte* and Lane

---

[80] Hanna, "Coffee and Coffee Merchants," 96.
[81] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 38.
[82] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 105, 108 ; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 37.
[83] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 160.

described Cairo's coffeehouses as having a stone, or brick, *maṣṭabah*-s, both on their outside wall (which was the preferred seat, according to Lane), and running along the inside wall. Small wooden boxes and long wooden benches served as additional seats, both inside and outside the coffeehouse. The *maṣṭabah*-s were covered with mats made of palm tree leaves, which were sometimes also strewn on the floor for sitting. Better coffeehouses used simple rugs for cover. A simple stove for preparing the coffee, and a simple cabinet or shelves for the coffee cups, completed the furniture in most coffeehouses. The better ones also had mirrors, and were lit by lamps.[84]

---

[84] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 159; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 37-8.
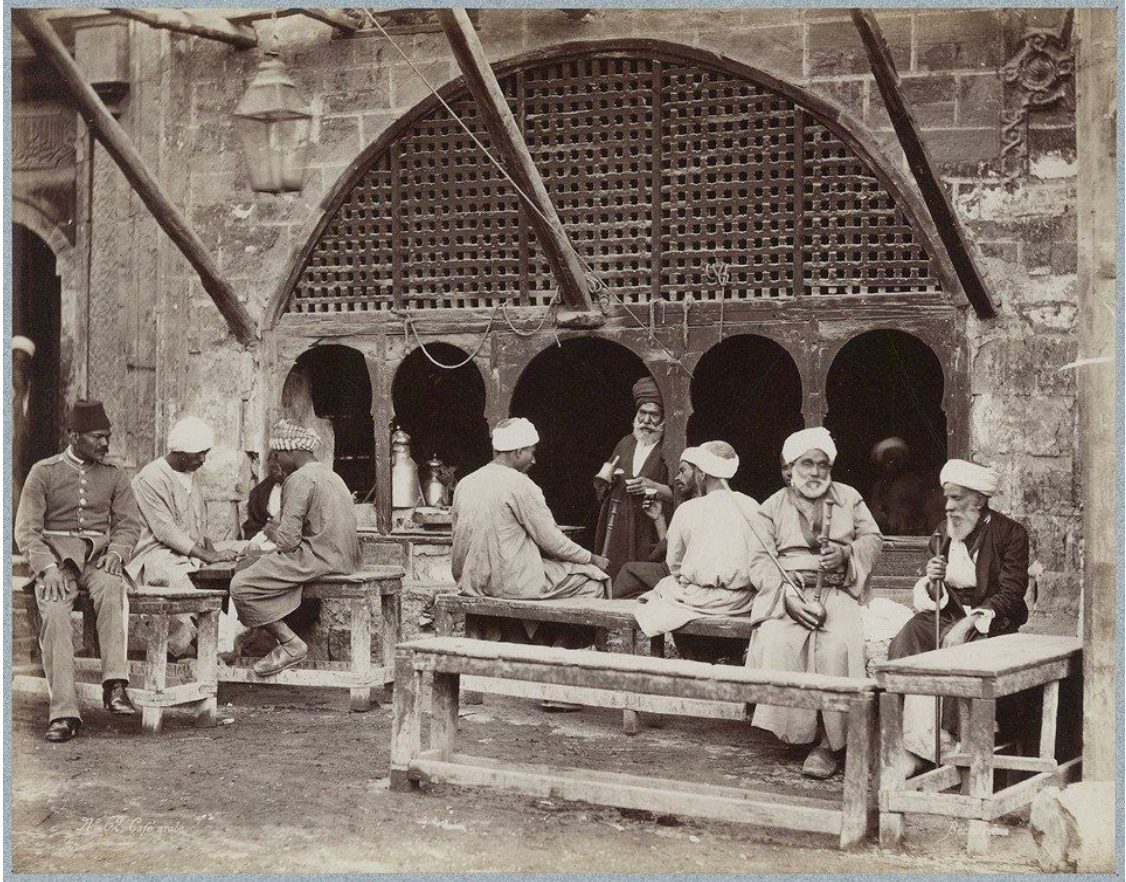
Figure 4. A coffeehouse in Cairo, c. 1875. Note the wooden *maṣṭabah*-s outside the coffeehouse; the blurred figure in the window indicates that there was a similar arrangement inside the coffeehouse as well. Note the cheap *jūzah* pipe held by the man on the right, the two men playing *manqalah* on the left, and the policeman watching the scene. Finally, note the woodwork above the door, the awning, and the lamp to be lit at night; a glimpse of a gate on the left indicates this coffeehouse was in a public area of town, probably near a market.

Henry Béchard, *Market and Street Scenes in Cairo*, c. 1875.

Drinking Coffee

The driving activity in a coffeehouse was, naturally, drinking coffee. As noted above,

Egypt was, from an early stage, the global distribution point for Yemenite (*Arabica*)

coffee – which made its merchants considerably wealthy – and that was the only kind of

coffee available in Egypt for a long time. Nevertheless, coffee from the European colonial plantations in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean slowly penetrated Egyptian markets during the eighteenth century, despite initial objections from Cairo's merchants. Nevertheless, elites, in their private homes, usually drank only pure *Arabica*, while coffeehouses used mixed coffee from all sources, and the more unscrupulous among them even mixed it with dirt and parts of the coffee bean that should have been discarded. It is important to note that coffee was not ground and roasted in coffeehouses: that was done by specialized artisans in a separate location, and the resulting powder was sold wholesale to the coffeehouses.[85]

In coffeehouses, the ground and roasted coffee was boiled in water twice or three times. The coffee was served boiling hot, and therefore was sipped rather than drank – something that European travelers noticed and emphasized as if different than their own customs. The coffee in Cairo was not sugared, except as a reviving beverage for the sick, and it was not sweetened with milk either. In fact, Egyptians found the French habit of sugaring their coffee, when they encountered it during the French occupation, to be rather ridiculous. Instead, Egyptians took their coffee with a side of sugared water that the *Description de l'Égypte* and Lane called sorbet and sherbet, respectively; sometimes, and especially on festive occasions, that sherbet was also flavored with ginger or other sweet fruit. More affluent Egyptians took their coffee with a side of jam or sweets, and they flavored their coffee with cardamom, or fumigated their cups with other perfumes.[86]

---

[85] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 97-106.
[86] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 159; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 189.

Coffee was served in small cups called *finjān*, the cheaper of which were made of painted earthenware, and the rest from porcelain. These were imported from Anatolia – the famous Kütahya fritware – from China, and even from Germany. As the coffee was boiling hot, these small *finjān*-s were put in another receptacle called *ẓarf*, which was made of copper, brass, or silver, according to the owner's circumstances. Ten or eleven *finjān*-s and *ẓarf*-s, with or without the coffee pot (*bakraj*) itself, were carried on a brass or silver tray by waiters, usually young boys, to the customers inside or outside the coffeehouse, or to customers in adjacent shops.[87]

Figure 5. Coffee Paraphernalia

Left: Cup and saucer, fritware with polychrome painted decoration, Turkey (Kütahya), about 1725.

Middle: Cup holder, fritware, pierced and painted in underglaze blue with polychrome decoration, Turkey (Kütahya), about 1725.

Right: Coffee pot and cover, fritware, polychrome painted imitating embroidery, Turkey (Kütahya), about 1725.

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

---

[87] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 159; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 188-9, 209; vol. 2, 9-10.

Coffee was very cheap: a cup cost between 1 to 3 *para* at the turn of the nineteenth century, and coffeehouses sold coffee to regulars on credit. A patron in a better coffeehouse usually drank two or three cups of coffee; the poorest could drink as many as thirty cups a day; and on average, one consumed six or seven cups a day. This is another indication that the poorest of Egyptians consumed coffee either as a major staple in their diet, and/or as a cheap stimulant to get them through a physical working day. It should be noted that until the late eighteenth century, most European travelers – and Mustafa Ali as well –   emphasized the fact that Egyptians used to drink their coffee early in the morning, and consequently that was the busiest time for coffeehouses. Very few before Lane in the 1830s mentioned coffeehouses that were active in the afternoons or evenings – that seems to have been a later development, when lower-class patrons came to drink coffee, smoke a pipe, and listen to story-tellers, especially during the nights of Ramadan.[88]

The Pipe and the Coffee

The most common accompaniment for coffee was the pipe: "tobacco without coffee," Lane quoted an Arab saying, "is like meat without salt."[89] Tobacco was introduced to Ottoman Egypt in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries,[90] that is, a couple of centuries after coffeehouses were. *Ḥashīsh* (hemp) and opium, however, were in use much earlier, probably since Antiquity, and they were also consumed in coffeehouses from an early

---

[88] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 160; Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 96-7 ; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 38, 236.
[89] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 278.
[90] Mubārak, *Al-Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 1, 57; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 35.

stage, according to Mustafa Ali (see above). Early nineteenth century accounts ascribed the smoking of the different plants to different social classes: rich Cairenes enjoyed tobacco from the Syrian port city of Latakia (Lādhiqiyyah), middle-class Cairenes enjoyed the one from Tyre, and the lower classes smoked local *ḥashīsh*.[91] According to Lane, opium was smoked by more well-to-do Cairenes in their private homes, which, if true, would indicate an interesting journey up the social hierarchy from its association with the lower classes in previous centuries.[92]

Smoking pipes were a ubiquitous accessory that engendered several menial occupations, such as cleaning them. They were also a status symbol, as they could be very ornate, covered in silk and other rich embroideries. There were many types of pipes in use, differentiated by the materials from which their water-bowls were made, if they had any, and by the shape, size, and material of their actual pipes. The more common types of pipes were: *narjīlah*, whose water-bowl was made of coconut, and was used by more affluent Egyptians; *shīshah*, whose water-bowl was made of glass; and *jūzah*, which was similar to the *narjīlah*, but with a short cane pipe instead of a long, flexible, one, and it was used by poorer Egyptians. Habitués carried their own pipe and tobacco in a purse, a habit that was still documented at the turn of the twentieth century.[93] Wealthier Cairenes had their servants carrying and preparing their pipes for them. Smoking the pipe was so associated with drinking coffee, that some coffeehouses carried pipes that they

---

[91] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 118-9 ; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 184-7; vol. 2, 38-9.
[92] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 40.
[93] One Khedival spy, Agent 294, who was also a shaykh in a mosque, mentioned in a report from 1901 how he used to carry around his own silver *shīshah* in a bag, while making his rounds of Cairo's coffeehouses: report by Agent 294, HIL 28/88-9, November 26, 1901.

offered to clients who did not have them, and some even sold tobacco and *ḥashīsh* (these were normally sold in special shops called *maḥshashiyyah*).[94]

Entertainment

The main social interaction that took place in coffeehouses was conversation. As Lane put it in regards to visiting friends at home, subjects of conversation in "good society" – over coffee – ranged from current news, prices and trade, religion and science, and family affairs.[95] As we shall see in chapter 3, Cairo's coffeehouses, especially since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, were also a go-to place for conversation about current politics. But conversation was not the only form of sociability: coffeehouses were, from the earliest stage, a locus of leisure and entertainment, especially, but not exclusively, of the popular kind.

Board games were especially popular. Mustafa Ali, already at the turn of the seventeenth century, commented about "vagrants" who played chess and backgammon in Cairo's coffeehouses.[96] At the turn of the nineteenth century, Chabrol observed in the *Description de l'Égypte* that chess was particularly loved by all classes of Egyptians. The difference between rich and poor was in the materials of the boards and pieces: the rich had them carved from precious wood, and the poor used a piece of cloth with differently colored patches sewn to them.[97] It seems that like coffee and coffeehouses, the popularity of certain board games might have spread "from the bottom up" the social hierarchy

---

[94] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 159-61 ; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 184-8; vol. 2, 39.

[95] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 278.

[96] *The Ottoman Gentleman*, 130.

[97] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 163-4.

through the centuries. In addition, Lane described at length the board game of *manqalah* (mancala) as a very popular pastime in Cairo's coffeehouses, and also noted card games being played for money. Interesting matches could attract a crowd of spectators in the coffeehouse, but they were not usually rowdy: spectators were described as attentively, and silently, watching the game. The gambling stakes in such matches were reportedly low: usually a round of coffee.[98]

A major form of entertainment associated with coffeehouses was story-telling. Professional story-tellers (*ḥakawātī*) used to go around the city's coffeehouses, situate themselves on a prominent *maṣṭabah* inside or outside the coffeehouse, and start their performance. Some were accompanied by an assistant, usually a young boy. Better coffeehouses that could afford it, employed a story-teller more or less regularly, and paid them a small sum for attracting crowds. Most story-tellers, however, were probably not employed regularly, and they earned whatever their spectators gave them, which could not have been much.[99] The *ḥakawātī*-s usually specialized in one of a few very well-known epics about mythologized historical personalities or Arabian tribes, such as the epics of Abu Zayd, ʿAntar, al-Ẓāhir Baybars, Alexander the Great, or Genghis Khan. One performance included only one part of the whole epic, thus performing the entire epic took a series of performances. These were especially well-attended during the nights of Ramadan and other festivities. The epic was recited in rhymed prose, from memory or not, and often tweaked to include subtle, or not so subtle, references to current affairs and

---

[98] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 162-5 ; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 51-60.

[99] There is even evidence for the existence of tax-paying, story-tellers-in-coffeehouses guilds from the seventeenth-, and the turn of the nineteenth centuries: Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 66, 185n.26.

personalities. The recitation was usually accompanied by a *rabābah*, a two-stringed musical instrument, and often also by some props, such as a sword, employed by the *ḥakawātī* in an animated fashion.[100]

Figure 6. The *Ḥakawātī* performing on a brick *maṣṭabah* outside a coffeehouse.

Drawing from: Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 120.

Courtesy of HathiTrust, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn6adf?urlappend=%3Bseq=570

---

[100] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 117-64, 236; Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 161-2. See also: Shawkat Abd al-Karīm al-Bayātī, *Taṭawwur Fann al-Ḥakawātī fī al-Turāth al-ʿArabī wa-Ātharuhu fī al-Maṣraḥ al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāṣir* [The Development of the Art of the Story-teller in the Arabic Tradition and its Influence on the Contemporary Arab Theater] (Baghdad: Wizārah al-Thaqāfah wal-ʾIʿlām, Dār al-Shuʾūn al-Thaqāfiyyah al-ʿĀmmah "Āfāq ʿArabīyyah", 1989); ʿAbīdū Bāshā, *ʾAqūlu Yā Sādah: Tajribah al-Ḥakawātī min al-Taqlīd ʾila al-Ḥadāthah* [I Say Gentlemen: The Story-teller Experience from Tradition to Modernity] (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2007).

Shadow-puppet theater (*karagoz*) was also popular in Cairo's coffeehouses, especially among Turkish speaking clientele, according to Lane. A form of popular theater with roots in Anatolia and Central Asia, it was performed in Turkish, not Arabic, and could be rather bawdy. It could only be performed at night, as the screen of its theater box had to be lit from behind.[101]

Another form of coffeehouse entertainment was spoken-word poetry. This could include reciting well-known poetry; but more often professional humorists used coffeehouses to compose and perform humorous, or rather satirical, poems in colloquial Egyptian Arabic (*zajal*), which could become very popular. A sort of a competition between two performers retorting quips back and forth was also popular, and could reference current events, issues, and personalities as well.[102] This staple of popular, lower-class, culture and entertainment existed mainly in coffeehouses, as they were nearly the sole urban space that could allow such public performances. *Zajal* was as popular as coffeehouses were, and it spread through the medium and networks of coffeehouses in the city.

---

[101] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 116. On the Karagoz theater, see: P.N. Boratav, "Ḳaragöz", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), <http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2155/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3905>

[102] Ziad Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism: Colloquial Culture and Media Capitalism, 1870-1919" (PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2007), 84-5; Özkul Çobanoğlu, "Cultural Interrelationships between Turkish Minstrel Tradition and Egyptian Folk Culture in the Socio-Cultural Context of Coffeehouses in Alexandria and Cairo," *International Journal of Modern Anthropology*, 2 (2009), 57-65.

Better coffeehouses, according to the *Description de l'Égypte*, also featured live music, which was listened to attentively and silently. Such musicians were paid regularly by the coffeehouse owners, with additional little sums paid by the audience.[103] Finally, dancing girls and boys were performing in front of some coffeehouses, especially during major festivities, as part of a panoply of street performances that were popular in public spaces such as squares, gardens and ponds, markets, and the plazas of mosques and mausoleums. Consider Lane's description of dancing-girls, and a couple of Greek dancing-boys, performing during the Mawlid (Birthday) of the *Hasanayn* (Prophet Muhmmad's grandsons, Hasan and Hussein), in front of the many coffeehouses around al-Ḥusayn Mosque, which stayed open and busy till morning during the festivities.[104]

---

[103] Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 162.
[104] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 211-3, 265.
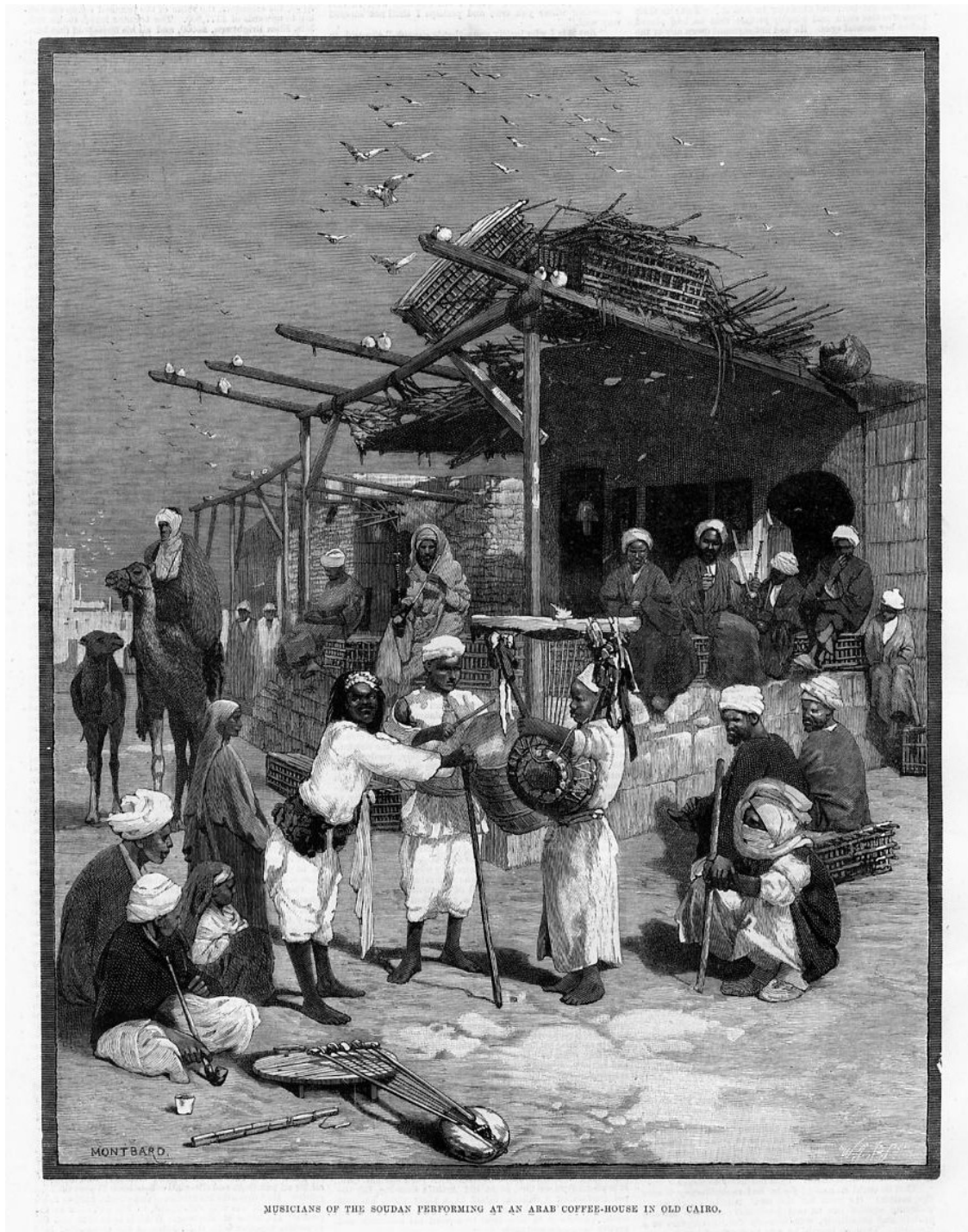
Figure 7. Sudanese musicians, and a singer/performer, performing outside a coffeehouse in Cairo, c. 1880s; from: *The Illustrated London News*, April 21, 1883.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library. "Musicians of the Soudan performing at an Arab coffee-house in Old Cairo." New York Public Library Digital Collections. http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/97798340-8544-8d45-e040-e00a18060355

Coffeehouses, then, were one of the principal places around which popular dance and song were performed. In 1830s Cairo, there were several types and classes of such performers. There were musicians and singers who performed for the rich and the upper-classes in parties at their homes. The women among them (s. ʿālimah, p. ʿawālim; the men were called ʾālātī) were highly regarded as professionals and connoisseurs of music and song, and they were usually well paid. They performed behind curtains, lattice-work, or on a balcony, thus segregated from the space where the men partied, for reasons of propriety. A separate class of popular dancers, accompanied by male musicians, performed in public spaces, as mentioned above, including in front of coffeehouses. The female dancers (s. ghāziyyah, p. ghāwāzī) were widely considered to be low-class prostitutes. Some managed to make a good living out of public dancing and sex work. It should be noted that there were some male dancers as well (called khawāl), who cross-dressed as female dancers, and were usually young and effeminate. Lane noted that cross-dressing male dancers who were "Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and Turks" were referred to by the Turkish term "Gink." Lane speculated that middle- and upper-class patrons hired khawāl-s to perform at their house parties to avoid the impropriety of having female-dancers perform there;[105] French writer and traveler, Gérard de Nerval, writing a few years later about his experiences in a coffeehouse in Mūskī, speculated that since the ghāwāzī were banished from Cairo in 1834, the numbers of khawāl-s grew.[106] Be that as it may, it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine the implications of the presence of female and cross-dressing male dancers around coffeehouses for the

---

[105] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 65-6, 98-105; Karin Van Nieuwkerk, *"A Trade Like Any Other": Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 21-39.

[106] Gérard de Nerval, *Voyage en orient*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1851), vol. 1, 143-6.

perceptions of gender and sexuality in early nineteenth century Cairo.[107] However, that presence does call for a short discussion about the role of coffeehouses in the gendering of urban space.

---

[107] On gender and sexuality in the Middle East in the pre-modern period, see: Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
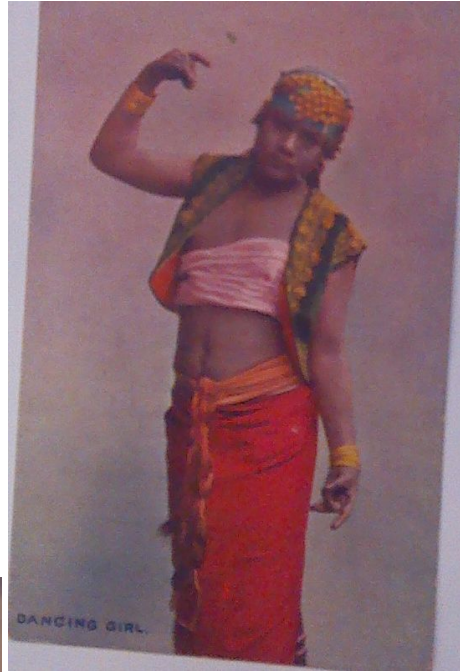
Figure 8. Dancers

Top-Left: "Egypte—Musicienne Indigène", [ʿālimah?] Photographic Postcard, Turn of the Twentieth Century. **Above**: "Dancing Girl", Colorized Photographic Postcard, Turn of the Twentieth Century. **Left**: "Khawāl bi-Maṣr"/ "No. 83 Egypte (Danseur exotique habillé en danseuse)", Photographic Postcard, Turn of the Twentieth Century.

Max Karkegi Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Boîte VZ-1246 (10).

Coffeehouses and the Gendering of Urban Space

Coffeehouses in Cairo, and elsewhere, were mostly patronized by men, and to a large extent they still are. The evidence brought above, however, offers some correctives to the popular view that coffeehouses were an "all-male space," and more importantly, it offers a socio-spatial context and meaning to the description of coffeehouse space as "male" in the first place.

For one thing, there were female *qahwajīyyah*-s: a rarity for sure, according to available data, but they did exist. Many more women owned the property rented for coffeehouses, whether they dealt with the renters directly or through male agents. Moreover, women did penetrate, sometimes, the space of coffeehouses. Consider, for example, figure 3 above, with the two women at the door, apparently leaving. Consider, too, figure 9 below, showing an outdoor coffeehouse, and note the two women at the back of the photograph. They appear to be sitting on one of the coffeehouse's *maṣṭabah*-s, sharing the space with men, albeit segregated at the back:

Figure 9. Donald Mcleish "Men of the storytellers' club gather at an outdoor cafe in Cairo, October 1, 1922". https://matnwahawamesh.wordpress.com/2012/01/22/once-upon-a-time-in-egypt-photography/

It is hard to glean from such drawings and photographs what exactly were the women doing in those coffeehouses,[108] or under what circumstances were they present there. But consider, for example, Lane's anecdote about a man talking to two of his friends in a coffeehouse about the troubles in his marriage and getting so upset that he summoned his wife to the coffeehouse and divorced her right there and then.[109] Such anecdotes suggest that the presence of women in coffeehouses was exceptional and disruptive,[110] although the drawing and the photograph might suggest otherwise.

What was certainly common, was the performance of female (and cross-dressing male) dancers in front of coffeehouses, and more significantly, the free movement of women in front of those coffeehouses, as women, especially of the lower-classes, did use the streets and public walkways of the city. Giving a literal meaning to the rather theoretical term "the male gaze," women, then, functioned as entertainment, a street show, to onlooking men sitting in coffeehouses, whether they danced directly for them, or were just passing by.[111]

---

[108] One of the women in the photograph seems to be breastfeeding, while the other is looking directly at the camera.

[109] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 248-9.

[110] One of the major action scenes in Naguib Mahfouz's 1947 realistic novel, *Zuqāq al-Midaq*, described the hero's wife bursting into her husband's coffeehouse, which was the beating heart of the little alley, raising hell about her husband's latest affair with a young man, who was present in the coffeehouse. Naguib Mahfouz, *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (1947), translated as: *Midaq Alley, Cairo*, by Trevor Le Gassick (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 110-5.

[111] Later on, and especially into the twentieth century, the phenomenon of male coffeehouse patrons gazing at the women passing by on the streets was depicted, and often criticized, in various publications. See chapter 2 for caricatures on the subject, and Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* for a description of how a local pimp was wooing the novel's heroine, Ḥamīdah, by intently looking at her window from his seat at the alley's coffeehouse. See also writer Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī's description of al-Qazzāz Coffeehouse near al-Mūskī Street and ʿAtabah Square, which was patronized by men from the countryside, who liked to sit there and watch Cairo's women, wearing various body and face coverings, going about their business in that busy shopping

Spatially, this relationship between the men in the coffeehouses and the women in front of them expanded the actual space of coffeehouses, which were already spilling out of the confines of their buildings into the streets, with their outdoor sitting outnumbering their indoor one. It compels us to think of coffeehouse space in relation to other spaces around it: the street or square right in front of it, as well as other purposed spaces, such as shops, barbershops, bathhouses, and more. Coffeehouse space cannot be understood on its own, and it must be considered in relation to other spaces and establishments, either physically around it, or socially connected to it.

Framing coffeehouse space in this way allows us to appreciate it in context, in this case, in the context of gendering the urban space. The fact that coffeehouses were patronized mostly by men, by no means meant that women did not participate in the social habit of drinking coffee. Indeed, making good coffee was a highly regarded skill for an accomplished bride to have: as early as the mid-seventeenth century, court (inheritance) records show that substantial dowries included a significant number of coffee cups, as well as equipment for making coffee.[112] Women prepared and consumed coffee in two main places: their homes, and their bathhouses. Women prepared coffee for their family meals, and for guests. More affluent women who resided in harems took their coffee there, prepared by servants, and coffee thus became a ritual part in visits that women paid to other women's harems.[113] Women consumed coffee also in women-only bathhouses, whether in private ones (rich women had them in their homes), or in public

---

street: Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, *Malāmiḥ al-Qāhirah fī 1000 Sanah* [The Characteristics of Cairo in 1000 Years] (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1983), 15.

[112] Hanna, "Coffee and Coffee Merchants," 97; Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 163.

[113] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M-y W-y M-e*, a new ed. (London: Printed for T. Cadell [etc.], 1784), vol. 1, 184, 189, 196, 206; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 182, 260, 278-9; Mikhail, ibid.

ones (whether exclusive for certain days, or for the whole week). Bathhouses were a major place for women to socialize, and drinking coffee after bathing, while sitting and talking for an extended amount of time, was a major part of that social ritual. The coffee was actually brought in from a nearby coffeehouse.[114] The equivalencies in social function between coffeehouses and women-only bathhouses were not lost on contemporary observers: Lady Mary Montagu, wife of the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in 1716-1718, wrote of the famous bathhouses of Ottoman Sophia that they were "the woman's coffee-house, where all the news of the town is told, scandal invented, etc."[115] In addition, coffee was consumed in weddings, funerals, and other holiday festivities, in which women fully participated alongside men, with no segregation.[116]

Thus, coffee connected coffeehouses with homes, bathhouses, and public spaces, where women were equally, or exclusively, present: in fact, only coffeehouses were mostly patronized by men. Women, then, did not so much lose opportunities to socialize because of coffeehouses, but rather were excluded – to a large extent but never fully – from the insides of just one public venue, situated in an urban space that was not otherwise gender-segregated. (And even there, women served as a spectacle, either dancing or passing by.)

In this context, it is significant that most coffeehouses were a low-class establishment: to the extent that they promoted the segregation of urban space according

---

[114] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 49-50; Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 96. It should be noted that men also used to drink coffee in their bathhouses: Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 2, 48.
[115] Montagu, *Letters*, vol. 1, 126.
[116] Montagu, *Letters*, vol. 1, 158, 200; Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 236; Chabrol, "Essai sur les moeurs," 86; Mikhail, ibid.

to gender categories, they did so by offering lower-class men the opportunity to reproduce social habits of the upper-classes. Spatial segregation along gender line, and the restrictions on the free movement of women in public space, were mainly upper-class habits (one had to have considerable amounts of money in order to maintain a harem, for example). Coffeehouses, then, allowed their lower-class male clientele to replicate upper-class gender segregation where it hitherto did not exist (and even that only to a certain extent). Of course, this replication was, in a sense, inverted: if upper-class social habits restricted the movement of women in public and confined them to a harem, then in coffeehouses those were the men who were affixed to that space, while the women were the ones in movement.

To conclude, the view of coffeehouses as "all-male spaces" should be qualified and put in perspective. While in upper-class houses most women were segregated and could not be seen by visiting men, in lower-class coffeehouses women did interact with men, either performing for them or being watched by them. This socio-spatial setup also gives some particular meaning to the designation of coffeehouses as "male" in the first place: as Mustafa Ali described already at the turn of the seventeenth century, coffeehouses were a space for male bravado, or the performance of hyper-masculinity.[117]

---

[117] See also chapter 2, for a discussion about the performance of hyper-masculinity in lower-class coffeehouses during the twentieth century. Mahfouz in his many novels about Cairo's coffeehouses also imbued their spaces with a sense of masculinity and femininity, according to the atmosphere built by their respective owners: in *Midaq Alley*, the coffeehouse is a masculine space where women were not allowed, or were a disruptive presence, and the coffeehouse was associated with broken family life, unrequited love, illicit sex, tension, conflict, and adversity. By contrast, in the novel *Karnak Café*, the coffeehouse, owned by a sensitive woman, and frequented by other women as well, is a feminine space: it is associated with family, love, sexuality, relaxation, and shelter. Naguib Mahfouz, *Al-Karnak* (1974), translated as: *Karnak Café*, by Roger Allen (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

Conclusion

Whether drank in a coffeehouse, at home with family and visitors, at the bathhouse, the shops, in a Sufi ceremony, a wedding, or a funeral, coffee was a social drink. So much so, that it deserved its own (public) "house." This novelty of a beverage started spreading in the Middle East in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through relatively small circles of enthusiasts, as it did in England and Europe a couple of centuries later, but unlike the latter case, the Middle Eastern enthusiasts were not elite men with a curiosity for the exotic, but relatively poor people who needed coffee as a stimulant for their religious ceremonies. In Cairo, coffee became popular among working people because of its stimulant properties, but it conquered the social scene, and changed the urban landscape, thanks to grand scale changes in global trade, and commercial agriculture. Commercially grown *coffea* in the Yemen as a substitute for another, at times prohibited, plant with stimulant properties (*qāt*), as well as European interference in the global spice trade, came together to make Cairo's merchants principal traders in coffee. As a consequence, they supplied and supported the new social habit of coffee-drinking, and its attendant social institution – the coffeehouse.

What made coffeehouses a social institution was the new kind of sociability they promoted. They offered low-earning men a space to socialize, which was not disreputable as taverns that served alcohol were, on the one hand, and was not inflected by another purpose, on the other, as commercial, religious, or governmental venues were. Coffeehouses, beyond the cheap stimulant – and for some, cheap nourishment – also offered men who were "captives of companionships" the space to "sit and talk with their friends for hours on end," like no other space did. It was naturally met with suspicion by

upper-class Ottomans, but in time they too adopted the habit of drinking coffee – a fascinating case of a social vogue spreading "from the bottom up" the social hierarchy, and not vice versa, as is usually theorized. Nevertheless, they did not adopt the coffeehouse: they drank coffee in the comfort of their own grand houses.

Available evidence shows that Cairo's coffeehouses consistently remained, up until the mid-nineteenth century, largely the purview of the lower tiers on the socio-economic scale, and were themselves rather modest, unlike coffeehouses in other Ottoman cities, such as Istanbul, Damascus, and Aleppo. Their numbers were high, but as small and cheap businesses, they may have been susceptible to rapid and significant changes in rates of openings and closures. They were also ubiquitous throughout the city, but usually concentrated in commercial and public areas, rather than purely residential ones. Surely, there were bigger, better, and more expensive coffeehouses than others, but these seem to had been serving mostly the artisan and small traders' class, and not the upper-class, who preferred to continue entertaining at home.

Although the habit of drinking coffee might have spread "from the bottom up," coffeehouses, then, offered low-earning men the opportunity to recreate upper-class sociability. This was especially apparent in the way they contributed to the gendering of urban space. Coffeehouses were largely – but never entirely – patronized by men, thus replicating a spatial segregation along gender lines, which was an upper-class practice, where it hitherto did not exist. But unlike the upper-class practice, those were the men who were stationary and confined to the coffeehouse space, and the women were the ones on the move. In this new, lower-class, segregated, space, women became a show: they either danced to the men sitting in coffeehouses, or were just a target for their probing

gaze. Beyond this dialectic relationship between the confines of the coffeehouse and the space directly in front of it, separately associated with men or women as they were, coffee also linked coffeehouses with other spaces in the city where women consumed coffee too: homes, bathhouses, and public festivals. This forces us to think of coffeehouses as part of a network of urban spaces, and not as a stand-alone place, that was simply, out-of-context, "male." Another consequence of this spatial segregation was that coffeehouses became a space for the performance of hyper-masculinity. At least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and probably beyond, there was a peculiar preponderance of Ottoman, non-native, and poor soldiers or veterans among the clientele of coffeehouses, as well as among their owners, operators, and super-intendants. Reportedly, they used coffeehouses also as a space for demonstrating some bravado, to compensate for their low social status.

Forms of sociability in coffeehouses were not restricted to conversation only, but included leisure and entertainment practices. Board and card games were early staples of coffeehouse sociability. In time, especially as afternoons and evenings became more popular times to frequent coffeehouses, rather than mornings, story-telling, colloquial and satirical poetry, as well as dancing and music became popular as well. Smoking pipes went hand in hand with drinking coffee. The kinds of coffee and herbs consumed, and the manner of their consumption, did change over the centuries, due to changes in the availability of raw materials, brought about by changes in global trade, but these changes were small and slow. Differences between coffee consumers in this respect followed their economic circumstances: more affluent people consumed more expensive coffee beans and more expensive herbs, in more expensive utensils and vessels. Fundamental and

rapid changes in consumption practices in coffeehouses, as well as in their urban development, design, and class makeup, happened from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Chapter 2:

New Coffeehouses and Socio-Cultural Change in a City Transformed

Introduction

Cairo's coffeehouse scene went through significant transformations from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. The immediate context was Cairo's accelerated urban development, and an influx of Mediterranean immigrants who brought with them different traditions about coffeehouses. These processes, in turn, were predicated on large scale, far-reaching, and rapid historical changes in almost every aspect of life, be it political, economic, cultural, or social – transformations that are at the very heart of historiographical debates about Egypt. Some of the major keywords in these debates are "Westernization," or "Europeanization," "Modernization," and "Colonialism," and these overburdened analytical frameworks are often strongly entangled with each other.

This chapter will take a nuanced look at what "Europeanization" might have meant for the everyday lives of Cairenes, by examining the new types of coffeehouses that emerged in Cairo at that time, whom they served, what they served, and what changes they encouraged in the existing coffeehouse scene. It will begin by surveying the urban development of Cairo from the 1870s to the 1910s, and discussing the "dual city"

model, which contrasted the new, "European," city, with the old, "Oriental," one. In that context, it will delve into a detailed description of the new, "European," coffeehouses, built in the new, "European," Cairo, their numbers, locations, owners, physical features, foodways, and the entertainment they offered, comparing them to the existing Egyptian-Ottoman coffeehouses described in chapter 1. This chapter will then discuss the widespread critique leveled against some of the practices introduced by the new coffeehouses, namely, the consumption of alcohol, mix gender socializing in public, and prostitution. Finally, it will examine how both foreigners and Egyptians perceived the new coffeehouse scene, the use that the effendiyyah made of them, and the popular coffeehouses (*qahāwī baladiyyah*).

This chapter will argue that looking at Cairo's urban history through the prism of its coffeehouse scene disturbs the "dual city" model, despite the best efforts and vested interests of many effendis to manufacture and sustain a clear distinction between the *qahāwī baladiyyah* and their kind of coffeehouses, whose "all-European" identity they willingly constructed out of a very Mediterranean praxis (and not necessarily under any colonial logic). Creating and maintaining these socio-cultural distinctions was supremely important for the effendiyyah, as coffeehouses became crucial for the formation and reproduction of that new social group. In the end, all kinds of coffeehouses – now distinguished by class and status – continued to fulfil essential social and cultural functions for their diverse clientele, while also facilitating great changes in gender relations, food culture, and entertainment.

"Paris on the Nile"

The history of urban development in Cairo during the nineteenth century has recently been a subject for some debate and reinterpretation as to its timing, nature, motives, models of inspiration, and the characters involved in its making. What is evidently in agreement is that from the 1860s onward, the city's built area grew rapidly – with the most dramatic growth occurring between 1896 and 1907 – and in very different ways than before: if in 1798 the total built area of Cairo was 853.1 hectares, then by 1916 it encompassed 3163.7 hectares, almost quadrupling the city in size.[118]

Khedive Ismail and the Building of New Cairo: Historiographical Debates

As to the nature of this rapid development, interpretations vary. Older narratives emphasized the role of Khedive Ismail (r. 1863-1879) in launching Cairo's transformation by quickly building new neighborhoods west of the city, towards the Nile, namely ʾAzbakiyyah and ʾIsmāʿīliyyah (and later also Bāb al-Lūq, and Naṣriyyah). With the aid of his trusted and multi-talented Minister of Public Works, Ali Mubarak, and a group of French and Italian architects and city planners, Ismail set out to build "Paris on the Nile." He was inspired, this narrative goes, by his 1867 visit to the second *Exposition Universelle* in Paris, where he witnessed first hand that city's ongoing urban transformation, famously presided over by Baron Haussmann. Thus, the new

---

[118] Jean-Luc Arnaud, *Le Caire, mise en place d'une ville moderne, 1867-1907: Des intérêts du prince aux sociétés privées* (Arles: Sindbad, 1998), 23-30.

neighborhoods he ordered in Cairo were fitted with wide straight boulevards, squares, European-style buildings, a park, an opera house, theaters, even a circus.[119]

This narrative has been recently challenged on several fronts. Some pointed out that urban planning and regeneration, including the cutting of new streets and building in a European architectural style, were ongoing in Cairo – and Alexandria – since at least the French occupation (1798-1801), and throughout the reigns of Ismail's predecessors (and during his own first years in power as well). In particular, those scholars point to the creation (1843) and activity of the Cairo Organization Board (*Majlis Tanẓīm al-Maḥrūsah*), or the Ornato (*Majlis al-ʾŪranātū*),[120] which was charged with zoning, regulating private building, cleaning, and rebuilding the city. Its stated motives were furthering ʿ*ummariyyah* (urban development) and public health, and it had to manage different kinds of pressures on its activity, such as having to deal with dilapidated *waqf*-s (religious endowments) through legal means, or push-backs from rich and influential proprietors about regulation. Other scholars challenged the significance of the role played by the heroes of the traditional narratives, especially Ali Mubarak. They highlighted the contributions of other figures, and other government ministries and agencies that were hitherto relegated to secondary roles, such as Nūbār Pasha, head of the Public Works

---

[119] Janet Abu-Lughod, Cairo: *1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); André Raymond, *Le Caire* (Paris: Fayard, 1993); ʿArafah ʿAbduh ʿAlī, *Al-Qāhirah fī ʿAṣr ʾIsmāʿīl* [Cairo during Ismail's Times] (Cairo: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1998); ʿAbd al-Munʿim ʾIbrāhīm al-Jumayʿī, *Al-Khidīwī ʾIsmāʿīl wa-Bināʾ al-Qāhirah al-Ḥadīthah: Mashrūʿ Bārīs al-Sharq* [Khedive Ismail and the Building of Modern Cairo: The Paris of the East Project] (n.p., 2001).
[120] *ʾŪrnātū* was a borrowed term from the Italian *Commissione di Ornato*, Commissions of Ornament, that were set up in Italy from 1807 under the Napoleonic occupation (themselves modelled after the French *Commissions des Arts*); the Arabic version of *Tanẓīm* may echo the Ottoman *Tanẓīmāt*, an institutional reform ("reorganization") drive in the Empire, which was implemented by Egypt's rulers only selectively, according to their own interests and needs. An Ornato commission was created in Alexandria already in 1834, and was responsible for its development at that time. Mercedes Volait, "Making Cairo Modern (1870-1950): Multiple Models for a 'European-Style' Urbanism," in Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait (eds.), *Urbanism: Imported or Exported?* (Chichester, England and Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Academy, 2003), 17-8.

Department before Mubarak, Cordier, head of the Water Company, Grand Bey, head of the Roads Department, and the Department of Public Parks.[121]

Urban historians, such as Mercedes Volait, have also brought into question the degree to which Haussmann's Paris served as a strict model for Cairo's development. Parisian development projects, such as Haussmann's world-famous sewer system, certainly served as inspiration, but Cairo's developers did not simply copy them wholesale. For one thing, Cairo's development since the 1860s centered upon expansion, that is, building, populating and urbanizing new neighborhoods, rather than remodeling the existing city around a renewed historical center, as Haussmann did in Paris. Even the two main streets that were cut in order to connect the new neighborhoods with the older ones, Clot Bey and Muhammad Ali streets, were far from being rectilinear, as the formal Parisian model demands. They have much more in common with the Algerian Bab-Azoum Street, than with the Parisian Rue de Rivoli, which was often cited as their inspiration. In fact, Volait argues, many of the French engineers who worked in Cairo had previous experience in Algeria. Some of Cairo's models, then, may have been French, but they were more French-colonial than Parisian. Moreover, what most impressed Ismail about Paris was probably Paris of the World Exhibition, rather than the ordinary city, which helps explain his personal concern with projects that involved fanfare, impression, and entertainment in ʾAzbakiyyah. Indeed, the opera house, the theaters, and the palaces of ʾAzbakiyyah were intended to impress Ismail's guests from

---

[121] Arnaud, *Le Caire*; Khaled Fahmy, "Modernizing Cairo: A Revisionist Narrative," in Nezar AlSayyad, Irene Bierman, Nasser Rabbat (eds.), *Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 173-99; Khaled Fahmy, "An Olfactory Tale of Two Cities: Cairo in the Nineteenth Century," in Jill Edwards (ed.), *Historians in Cairo* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 155-87; ʿAyman Fuʾād Sayyid, *Al-Qāhirah: Khiṭaṭuhā wa-Taṭawwuruhā al-ʿUmrānī* [Cairo: Its Urban Planning and Development] (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 2015).

European royalty who came for the 1869 grand opening of the Suez Canal, as well as to project his Khedival power to his elite.[122]

Urban Development in the Nineteenth Century

Whatever the reinterpretation or reframing, there is no doubt that Cairo since the 1860s experienced vast expansions that profoundly changed the cityscape, and permanently moved its center away from the walled Mamluk-Ottoman city westward. This building spree can be divided into two periods: the large-scale projects of Khedive Ismail's time (1869-1874), and the subsequent years until independence (1922), most of which were spent under British colonial control (1882-1922). The building projects under Ismail were made possible by an unprecedented economic boom, which followed two major events: one was the increased cultivation of cotton in Egypt and its skyrocketing prices on the international markets, caused by the American Civil War (1861-1865) that blocked the export of American cotton; and the other was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. It is noteworthy, however, that only ʾAzbakiyyah was financed directly by the Khedive's treasury, while the land for the other neighborhoods (ʾIsmāʿīliyyah, Bāb al-Lūq, and Naṣriyyah) was given for free to developers, who agreed to build them according to governmental guidelines. The projects of Ismail's time also included, beyond the four new neighborhoods, gardens and promenades (such as the Jazīrah Park), the two

---

[122] Volait, "Making Cairo Modern."

aforementioned new streets cut through the old neighborhoods, and the spa village of

Ḥilwān.[123]

---

[123] Volait, "Making Cairo Modern;" Arnaud, *Le Caire*.
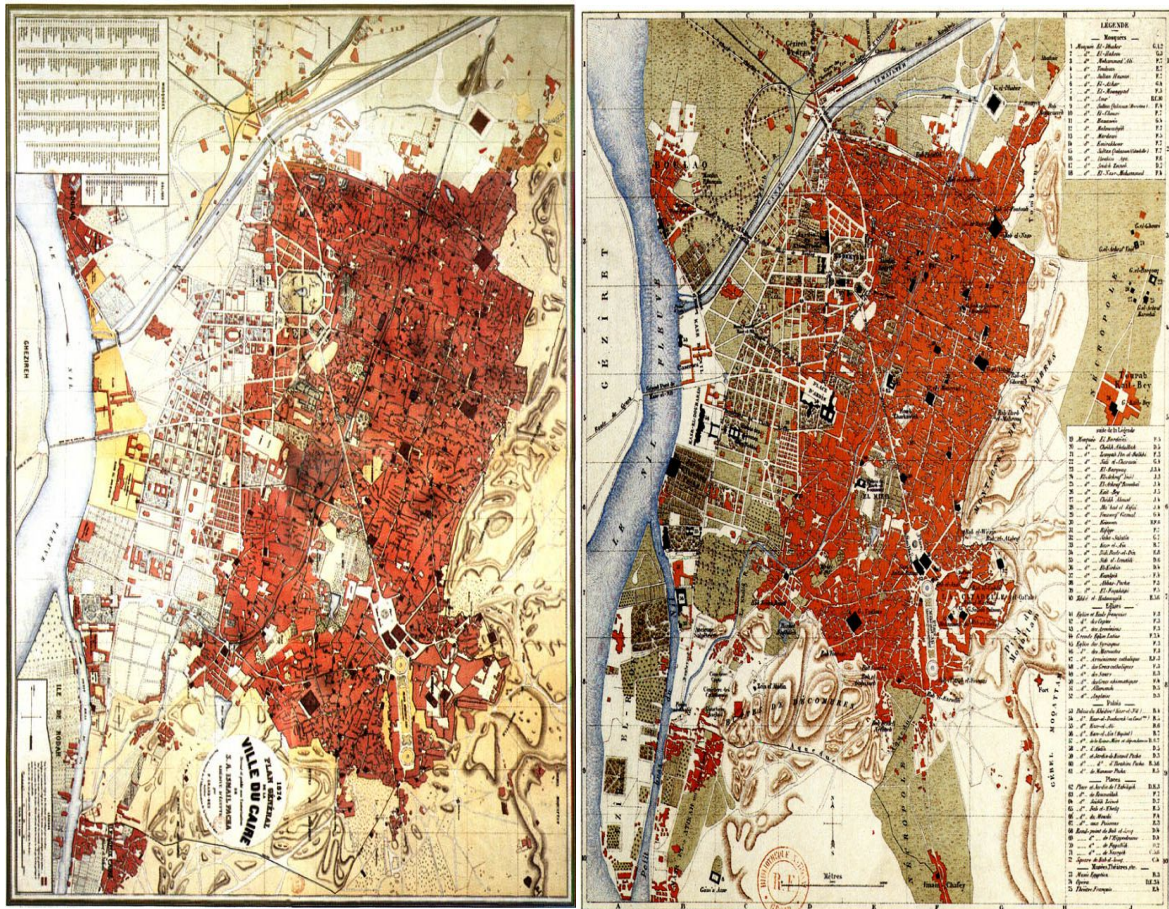
Map 2. General maps of Cairo. On the left, an 1874 map (reoriented to the north). On the right, an 1888 map. The brown color represents the densely built Mamluk-Ottoman city. In the upper middle part, it is easy to spot the octagonal shape of the new ʾAzbakiyyah Park, and not far below it (to its south), the rectangular shape of the new ʿĀbdīn Palace. It is also easy to notice the wide and straight boulevards (white lines) extending from the Ottoman city westward towards the Nile, and the sparsely built areas among the greenery of the new neighborhoods.

Left: Georges Erhard Schièble and Pierre Grand Bey, 1874, *Plan général de la Ville du Caire* [Map, reoriented], Scale 1:4000, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53099635v

Right: L. Thuillier, 1888, *Le Caire, Itinerare de l'Orient, Egypt* [Map], Paris Hachette

This building spree was halted by the financial crisis of 1874, which signaled the retreat of the government from public works and city planning, and the transfer of building initiatives to private hands: real estate and construction companies, as well as banks and other financial institutions, both foreign and local. British colonialism did not alter this trend: its administration decided to invest in improving commercial agriculture (mainly cotton), and transportation, but largely stayed clear from urban development (with the exception of improving the sewer and drainage system in Cairo). Nevertheless, it was during this period, as noted above, when urbanization was left to private hands, that Cairo experienced its most dramatic growth, far outpacing the one occurring under Ismail.[124]

---

[124] Ibid.
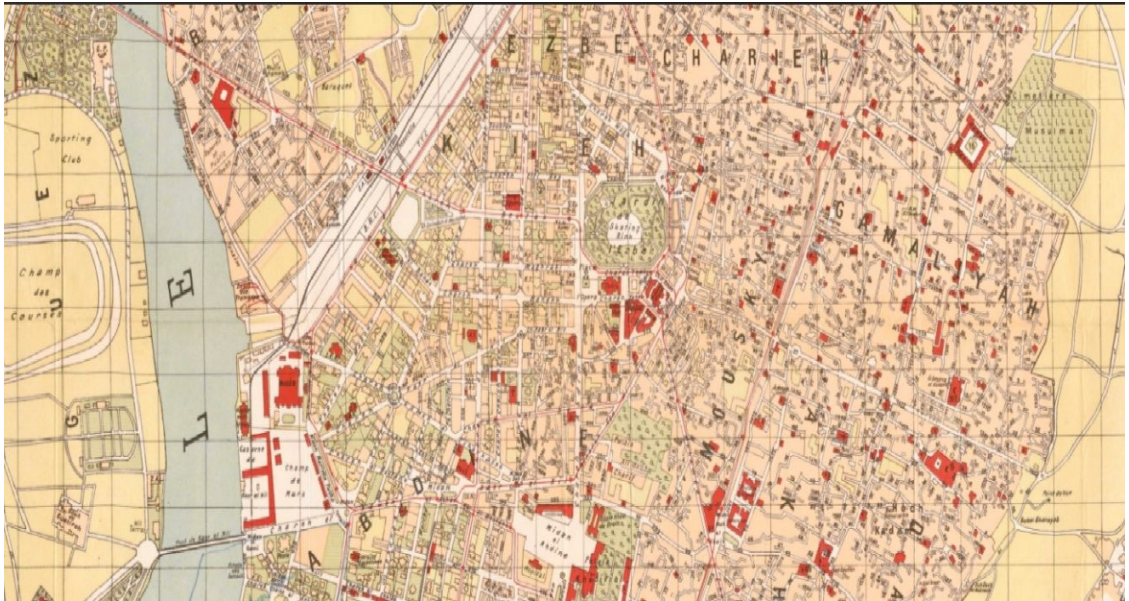
Map 3. An extract section from a 1914 map of Cairo, showing ʾAzbakiyyah Park (in the middle) and ʿĀbdīn Palace to its south, amid the old neighborhoods of Jamāliyyah (Gamaliah) and Mūskī (Mousky) to their east (right), and the new neighborhoods, now densely built, of Ismāʿīliyyah (Abdin in the map), which included Bāb al-Lūq and Naṣriyyah. The square on the lower left side is Soliman Pasha Square, now Talʿat Ḥarb Square, famous heart of Downtown Cairo (Wuṣṭ al-Balad).

Rodolphe Huber, *Nouveau Plan Du Caire* [Map], [1914], Scale 1:10000 (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf & Fils), The National Archives, Kew MFQ 1/1379/59.

It was only after independence in 1922 that the Egyptian government returned to play a significant role in the city's urban development, led by Egyptian architects who learned their craft in Britain, thus bringing with them British architectural influences. For until then, during the British colonial period, Cairo's new architecture and cityscape continued to be influenced by French and Italian models. This history drives home a

crucial point: the choice of adapting French and Italian urban forms to the developmental needs of Cairo, which is often crudely termed "Europeanization," was freely made by the city's developers both before, and in spite of, British colonialism.[125]

The "Dual City" Model

Cairo's new expansions indeed looked very different than its older neighborhoods. They were intended by Khedive Ismail to support his oft-quoted adage that Egypt "was no longer part of Africa, but belonged to Europe," or as his planners and architects put it, the "Haussmannization" of Cairo (although in realty, it was not that accurate). The new neighborhoods were also perceived as "European" by contemporaries – at least, by European tourists and residents. British, European, and American tourists and residents filled their diaries, travelogues, tourist-guides, and other descriptions with an emphatic distinction between the "European city" and the "Oriental city," or between old and new Cairo. They were generally content with living in the European part of town, but were most captivated by the Oriental part, where they fully expected to see scenes from the *Thousand and One Nights* come alive before their eyes. This dichotomy between the two parts of the city caught on with later researchers as well, who discussed Cairo as a "dual city." Other scholars have recently called to rethink the model of a "dual city": Khaled Fahmy suggested an examination of Cairo's sensory history (through smell) in order to cross the barrier between the two cities, but ended up discussing the development of old Cairo as an outcome of public health concerns; similarly, Heba Ahmed offered an

---

[125] Ibid. For a detailed study of French and French-inspired architecture in Cairo, see also: Mercedes Volait, *Architectes et architectures de l'Égypte moderne (1830-1950): Genèse et essor d'une expertise locale* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005).

analysis of various texts written by Westerners about Cairo, comparing them to texts written by Egyptians about Paris, but ultimately did not show how they disturbed the dual model.[126] In what follows, I explore how the emergence of new coffeehouses in the new neighborhoods can explain why the distinction between the two parts of Cairo was preserved, by whom, and how it was disturbed.

Mediterraneans and "European" Cairo

A Mediterranean Migration

Who exactly were those "Europeans" that settled in the European part of Cairo? Throughout the nineteenth century, Alexandria and Cairo were the two main destinations for travelers, soldiers, diplomats, merchants, invited experts, and work-migrants; their numbers increased dramatically as Egypt's economic fortunes offered more opportunities for work and financial gain, and as its rulers invited more experts to work on their modernization projects. By the end of the century, the growth of the British colonial administration and army, as well as a growing tourist industry, expanded the small British community in Egypt. According to Ali Mubarak, during the French Occupation there were approximately 400 Europeans (ʾAfranj) living in Cairo, most of whom came in with the French, as well as some 22000 "Greeks [ʾArwām], Syrians [Shuwwām], Maronites, and Armenians," that is, various Ottoman Christians. According to the 1882 census, that is before the significant population growth of the 1890s, there were already 19247

---

[126] Heba Farouk Ahmed, "Nineteenth-Century Cairo: A Dual City?," in *Making Cairo Medieval*, 143-72; Fahmy, "An Olfactory Tale"; Fahmy, "Modernizing Cairo."

Europeans (*ʾŪrubāwiyyah,* including Greeks), and 3175 other foreign Arabs – North Africans, and probably Syrians – which make for a total of 22422 foreigners (*ʾArghāb*) out of 374838 residents in Cairo, that is, about 5.9% of its population. Mubarak gave the following breakdown: 7000 Greeks, 5000 French, 1000 English, 1800 Austrians, 450 Germans, 400 Persians (*ʾAʿjām*), 3367 Italians, and 230 other Europeans.[127] By the census of 1917, there were 7500 British, 8252 French, 15655 Italians, and 12081 Ottomans in Cairo.[128] Other sources put the number of Greek citizens in 1917 Cairo at 15250.[129]

Population statistics are notoriously problematic and disputable, and these are no different;[130] however, they do illustrate the dramatic rise in immigrants to Cairo throughout the century, and especially since the 1880s. They also illustrate a key point about the origins of those immigrants: with the exception of the British, they were mostly Mediterraneans. The biggest communities were Greek, Italian, French, and non-Egyptian Ottoman. That last category could include *Shawām*, North Africans, Yemenites, ethnic Turks, or ethnic Greeks still under Ottoman suzerainty. Moreover, citizenship categories did not mean what they mean in the 21st century: French citizens could also be North Africans, Italians, and Maltese – and the latter could also be British. Finally, because having European citizenship or protection (*ḥimāyah*) under the Capitulations Regime meant that a person was not under local jurisdiction, or enjoyed special legal

---

[127] Mubārak, *Al-Khiṭaṭ,* vol. 1, 98-9.

[128] Maṣr, Maṣlaḥah ʿUmūm al-ʾIḥṣāʾ, *Taʿdād Sukkān al-Quṭr al-Miṣrī li-Sanah 1917* [Census of Egypt 1917] (Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʾAmīriyyah, 1920-1921), vol. 2, 534-5

[129] Alexander Kitroeff, *The Greeks in Egypt, 1919-1937: Ethnicity and Class* (London: Ithaca Press, 1989), 14. This number may overlap with other categories in the 1917 census, especially the "Ottoman" or local ones.

[130] On the debate about these figures, see: Arnaud, *Le Caire,* 19-23.

dispensations, that status was very sought after, and many Egyptian minorities, such as the Jewish and Christian ones, worked hard to get it, and sometimes even manipulated the system in order to do so. Thus, Egypt was squarely a part of an intense system of Mediterranean migration, which was in full swing at the time, while the European identity of many a Mediterranean was very much a local construction.[131]

Patterns of Settlement in Old and New Cairo

More instructive are patterns of settlement of different social groups throughout the urban fabric of Cairo. ʾAzbakiyyah, with its park, opera house, theaters, and some grand (European-style) coffeehouses, became the site for European consulates, and major banks. The people who settled around there by the mid-1870s were the European consuls and consulate employees (foreigners or Egyptian protégés, Muslims and non-Muslims), foreigners with mostly Italian and French names, and few Pashas, usually non-Muslims. This area of the new city was the only one originally intended for Europeans, who only needed to move slightly westward from their older quarters in the Frankish and Jewish neighborhoods around Mūskī Street in the old city. ʾAzbakiyyah was also the only area in town where foreigners can be said to have enjoyed a slight majority among the population.

---

[131] See: Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
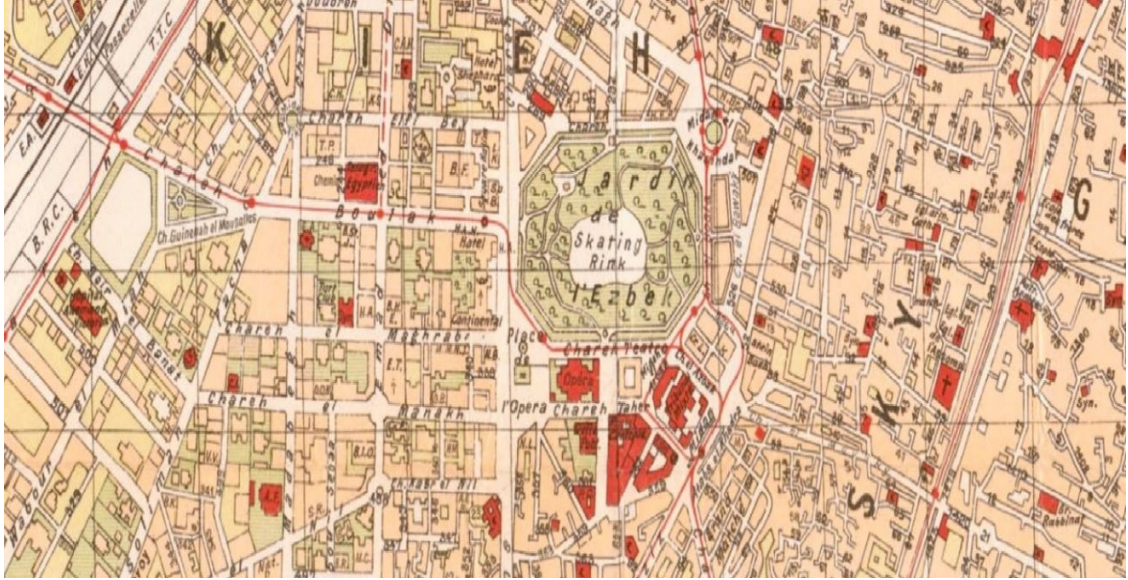
Map 4. An enlarged extract from a 1914 map of Cairo, showing ʾAzbakiyyah Park (in the middle) with the Opera House, the Mixed Tribunals, and the Public Debt Building to its immediate south, and ʿAtabah al-Khaḍrāʾ Square to their south-east, where the tram and railway hub will be built. The Sheapheard's Hotel and Continental Hotel are to the immediate west (left) of the park. The older Mūskī neighborhood is to the immediate east (right) of the park.

Rodolphe Huber, *Nouveau Plan Du Caire* [Map], [1914], Scale 1:10000 (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf & Fils), The National Archives, Kew MFQ 1/1379/59.

The south end of the ʾIsmāʿīliyyah neighborhood was occupied by the palaces of the Khedival family and a few Pashas. In between those two areas were settled Beys, effendis, and non-titled Egyptians and foreigners, Muslims and non-Muslims, who were government employees, educated middle-class professionals and officials. The more eastern the area of the new neighborhoods was, that is, the closer it was to the old city, the denser it was, and the smaller its dwellings were. Artisans, wholesale traders, and

workers were left in the old neighborhoods, and were restricted, in more ways than one,

from living in the new neighborhoods.[132]

Map 5. An enlarged extract from a 1914 map of Cairo, showing ʿĀbdīn Palace (in the mid-bottom) and its surroundings. Note the large palaces to its immediate south, and the mix of palaces, mansions, villas, and large buildings to its west. Soliman Pasha Square, now Talʿat Ḥarb Square, is in the upper-left, and to its south-west is Ismāʿīliyyah Square, now Taḥrīr Square.

Rodolphe Huber, *Nouveau Plan Du Caire* [Map], [1914], Scale 1:10000 (Munich: Dr. C. Wolf & Fils), The National Archives, Kew MFQ 1/1379/59.

---

[132] Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 166-74.

Despite properties changing hands, and despite the significant growth in population, those fundamental trends did not change significantly throughout the 1890s and beyond; if anything, they only intensified. The south end of the new neighborhoods continued to be occupied by the Khedival family; their middle, around ʿĀbdīn Palace, the official seat of Khedival power, continued to be populated by Beys and effendis, the state employees; and the north of the new neighborhoods, around ʾAzbakiyyah, was home for many *khawājah*-s, as they now became to be known – a term that designated foreignness, and was loosely applied both to foreign nationals, but also to non-Muslim Egyptians of various ethnicities.[133] The old neighborhoods continued to be occupied by poorer social groups, most of whom were Muslim, except for people in certain neighborhoods, such as the Mūskī. This does not mean that there were no population movements in the city: those who benefitted from the economic growth continuously moved westward, out from the old neighborhoods and into the new ones. The places they left behind were probably occupied by new migrants to the city from rural areas. These migrants also filled new neighborhoods with very poor dwellings that quickly grew in the north, and south of the city, that is, on the perimeter of both the new and old neighborhoods.[134]

To sum up, what clearly transpires from the above survey of social distribution across Cairo's urban fabric during the period in question is that while its new neighborhoods may have looked "European," and most Mediterranean immigrants and Egyptian non-Muslims settled there, they only rarely constituted a majority anywhere in Cairo. They lived in the new, "European city," intermingled with a majority of upper-

---

[133] Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 256-69.
[134] Arnaud, *Le Caire*, 298-321.

and middle-class Muslim Egyptians who moved in from the old neighborhoods, and they all worked for the government, in finance, or in the professions. Indeed, the distinctions and exclusions between the "European" city and the "Oriental" one were much less about ethnic origin, religious belief, or colonial control, and had much more to do with socio-economic status, and the need to perform it.[135]

The New Coffeehouses

Many among those Mediterranean migrants, especially Greeks and Italians, and many among the (overlapping category of) *khawājah*-s, opened new coffeehouses according to the styles and manners of coffeehouses on the other side of the Mediterranean. Those new coffeehouses were more spacious, they were internally designed, decorated, and furnished differently, they offered different kinds of beverages, as well as food, provided different kinds of entertainment, and served different kinds of people.

Numbers and Location

Ali Mubarak produced the following table for Cairo's different districts circa 1881, based on records of the Cairo municipality:

---

[135] See also: Nelly Hanna, "The Urban History of Cairo around 1900: A Reinterpretation," in Edwards, *Historians in Cairo*, 189-203.

District	Number of Coffeehouses
ʾAzbakiyyah	252
Būlāq	160
ʿĀbdīn	102
Al-Sayyidah Zaynab	71
Al-Khalīfah	75
Maṣr al-ʿAtīqah (Old Cairo)	54
Bāb al-Shaʿriyyah	66
Qūṣūn	85
Al-Jamāliyyah	142
Al-Darb al-ʾAḥmar	60
Total	1067

Table 1. Cairo's Coffeehouses by District, circa 1881.

Source: ʿAlī Mubārak, *Al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyyah*, vol. 1, 95.

Within a very short time, then, no more than a couple of decades, the number of

coffeehouses in the new neighborhood of ʾAzbakiyyah was significantly higher than

anywhere else in the city, easily surpassing their number in the long-existing commercial

center of the old city, al-Jamāliyyah. Since European architecture (Italian or French) was imperative in ʾAzbakiyyah, and it had the highest concentration of foreign nationals and *khawājah*-s as residents, it is safe to assume that the new coffeehouses there were of European style. This attests to the scale and pace with which the new kind of coffeehouses entered the urban scene – it was not gradual, but rather swift. Considering the low density of the population in the new neighborhoods at the time, it seems that those coffeehouses were fundamentally important to their social lives, and conspicuously prominent in their urban fabric. What the proliferation of the new coffeehouses shared with the Ottoman ones, according to this table, was their concentration in the more commercial neighborhoods, rather than the purely residential ones, at least in that point in time.

The spatial associations of the different kinds of coffeehouses were, however, different. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ottoman coffeehouses were spatially associated with barbershops, taverns and *būẓah* shops, other small shops, especially of various food, spices, and aromatics, or with whole markets and *wikālah*-s. The European coffeehouses, on the other hand, were spatially associated with official grand buildings, as we can glean from some of their (French) names: Café de la Bourse, Café de la Poste, Café de l'Opera. They were also located near consulates, banks, office buildings, and, of course, each other. Moreover, they were strongly connected to the entertainment, food, and hospitality industries: one French statistical yearbook from 1872-3, for example, listed the principal coffeehouses among the principal hotels, restaurants, and music-halls

("cafés-concerts," see below) in the European parts of Cairo.[136] As we will see, those coffeehouses were also associated with, or doubled themselves as, taverns, dancing-halls, and houses of disrepute.

The 1872-3 yearbook mentioned no less than 13 major coffeehouses in Cairo, all of them in and around ʾAzbakiyyah Park, and three of those on a street named after the most famous café-concert of *fin de siècle* Cairo: the Eldorado. These were their names: Café Du Cercle Orientale, Grand Café d'Orient, Café Égyptien, Café De la Bourse, Café Pélissier, Café De l'Hermitage, Café Delle Alpi, Café Centrale, Café De la Poste (also known as Matatia, see the next chapter), Café De France, Café De Midi, Café De Memphis, and Café Des Pyramides.[137] By the 1890s, new big names came on the scene – all of them still in the ʾAzbakiyyah neighborhood: New Bar, Bosphore, Santi, Bodega, and Café Chicha (*shīshah*), while the older Café De la Bourse, and the Eldorado persisted.[138] It was only at the start of the new century that the ʾAzbakiyyah scene slowly died down, and the Bāb al-Lūq neighborhood (today's "Downtown Cairo," or *Wusṭ al-Balad*) emerged as the new trendy location for leisure, entertainment, and shopping, populated as it was by a new urban middle class. Bāb al-Lūq's coffeehouse scene was then dominated by Groppi and Café Riche, which were located not very far from each other.

---

[136] François Levernay, *Guide-Annuaire d'Égypte, Année 1872-1873* (Cairo: Typographie Française Delbos-Demouret, n.d.), 313-5.

[137] Levernay, *Guide-Annuaire*, 314.

[138] These places, along with some others, were frequently mentioned in the reports of police officer Muhammad Saʿīd Shīmī Bey to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II throughout the 1890s. See, for example: Report from Shīmī Bey, September 27, 1894, HIL 15/99-104; Report from Shīmī Bey, November 19, 1894, HIL 15/131-136.

Figure 10. Four photographs of some of the most famous cafés and bars in late nineteenth century Cairo. From top left clockwise: Solet, New Bar, Chicha Café, and Splendid Bar.

Photographs, August 1919, Max Karkegi Collections, *L'Egypte d'Antan*
http://www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm

Figure 11. Café Chicha and Santi

Left: The famous Santi Café-Restaurant inside the ʾAzbakiyyah Park in 1874. Emile Béchard, photographer, "[Santi, 1874]", Photograph, from Max Karkegi Collections, *L'Egypte d'Antan* http://www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm

Right: The famous Café Chicha (Shisha) in front of ʾAzbakiyyah Park at the turn of the twentieth century. "Caire: Grand Café Chicha, n.d.", Colorized Photograph, from Max Karkegi Collections, *L'Egypte d'Antan* http://www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm

The Cafetiers, or: Groppi – the Early Years

As we saw in the previous chapter, already by the 1868 census, more non-Egyptian subjects became *qahwājī*-s. The new coffeehouse scene was dominated, at first, by foreigners and *khawājah*-s, who were the main *cafetiers* – the French term for *qahwājī*-s. All the names of owners/operators of the 13 principal coffeehouses on the 1872-3 list were Greek, Italian, or French.[139] Alcohol licenses from the 1890s may indicate a continuation of this trend, because, as we will see below, many of the new coffeehouses

---

[139] Levernay, *Guide-Annuaire*, 314.

also served alcohol: in 1893, for example, 75 percent of alcohol licenses in Cairo were granted to Greeks and Italians.[140] Greeks in Alexandria so dominated the coffeehouse scene there, that by the 1940s even non-Greek Egyptians learned how to shout their order at the waiters in Greek;[141] and Greeks were often portrayed as coffeehouse owners in Egyptian popular culture.[142]

It must be emphasized, however, that the new coffeehouse scene did not stay completely in the hands of "foreigners" for very long. (While "foreigners" often meant non-Muslim Egyptians, or other Ottomans.) As Omar Foda showed, the land on which many of the new coffeehouses and bars were built was owned by Muslim Egyptians, many of whom Pashas and even princes from the Khedival family. Many owned the establishments directly, while *khawājah*-s rented or operated them.[143] Moreover, there was a widespread phenomenon of Egyptians fictitiously selling properties or businesses to foreigners and protégés in order to evade the reach of Egyptian laws and taxes (making reliance on official records of ownership problematic). Many coffeehouses also changed hands quickly: by 1919, Café Chicha and New Bar, for example, were owned by one Ḥamdī Bey Ṣādiq.[144]

---

[140] Omar Foda, "The Pyramid and the Crown: The Egyptian Beer Industry from 1897 to 1963," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 46 (2014), 144; Joseph Ben Prestel, *Emotional Cities: Debates on Urban Change in Berlin and Cairo, 1860-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 125-6.

[141] An anonymous, unpublished, memoir from 1940s Alexandria, courtesy of Moshe Khalaf, interviewed on October 23, 2015.

[142] See, for example, the character of *khawājah* Anton, the Greek coffeehouse owner, in *Fahemuhu* ("Explain to Him"), a 1920 comedy written by Amin Ṣidqī for the comedy star Ali al-Kassār: Sayyid ʿAlī ʾIsmāʿīl, *Masraḥ ʿAlī al-Kassār* [The Theater of ʿAlī al-Kassār] (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, National Center for Drama, Music and the Folkloric Arts, 2006), vol. 1, 163-214. On the image of Greek grocers and workers, see: Kitroeff, *The Greeks in Egypt*,126-41.

[143] Foda, "The Pyramid and the Crown," 144-5.

[144] British Army (General Staff Intelligence) Report, August 10, and Egyptian Police Reports, August 11, 16, and 19, 1919, FO 141/781/6. Café Riche, for another example, also changed hands quickly, from an

If previously women were a rarity in the business, then with the new coffeehouses more and more women entered the scene. Of the 13 *cafetiers* listed in 1872-3, at least three were women (the gender of a few more names on the list cannot be determined).[145] If we consider the dance-halls, music-halls, or houses of disrepute that proliferated in ʾAzbakiyyah in the 1880s and 1890s, and were associated with coffeehouses, then the number of women in the business spikes dramatically (see below). Moreover, if not owning or managing coffeehouses themselves, women were employed by the new *cafetiers*: Groppi, for example, employed women as waiters and hostesses already in 1890s Alexandria, and when he opened a call center for phone orders in 1938, it was entirely operated by eight or ten women.[146]

The early years of the Groppi phenomenal success story is illustrative of the new type of *cafetiers*. Battista and Giacomo Groppi were two brothers in the little village of Lugano, in Ticino (the Italian part of Switzerland), from a family of watchmakers. An economic crisis – not a rare occurrence in the poor province of Ticino – pushed the brothers out of the watchmaking business, and out of Lugano, to Marseille. There they found work with a *cafetier-patissier*, whose business they soon bought out, and renamed *Groppi* – the very first Groppi was opened, then, in Marseilles. But Marseilles, that Mediterranean port city with strong trading connections to Egypt and North Africa, was filled at the time with talk about the goldmine that Egypt was: its economy was booming,

---

Austrian businessman, to a French one, to three successive Greek owners, till finally in 1960 Upper Egyptian, Abd al-Malāk Khalīl, bought the place: Muhammad Abd al-Wāḥid, *Ḥarāʾiq al-Kalām fī Maqāhī al-Qāhirah* [The Hot Talk about Cairo's Coffeehouses] (Cairo: ʾAṭlas lil-Nashr wal-ʾIntāj al-ʾIʿlāmī, 2003), 114-5.

[145] Levernay, *Guide-Annuaire*, 314.

[146] Interview with Franco Groppi, Geneva, January 25, 2016; J. R. Fiechter, *Cent ans de vie Suisse au Caire: Mémoires et documents* (Alexandria: Imprimerie Procaccia, 1946), 237.

it had a large community of Greeks and Italians, just like the Groppis, and most importantly, it was free of taxes for Europeans. The brothers decided to try their luck in Egypt: again they started out working for someone else, the successful Italian (Milanese) patissier, Giacomo Gianola, in Cairo, and soon, in 1890, they bought his place in Alexandria, which they turned to the first Groppi in Egypt (another one followed a few years later, also in Alexandria). Battista, the elder brother, soon fell ill, left the business to his brother Giacomo – now also going by the French Jacques – and returned to Ticino, never to come back to Egypt.

Jacque (Giacomo) Groppi had a flair for business – he started exporting eggs from Egypt to England – and did so well, that in 1906 he sold his successful business to the Frenchman Auguste Baudrot, and went back to Ticino. Unfortunately, he lost all that money in another economic crisis in Ticino, and in some bad investments, so he decided to return to Egypt in order to try his luck there again, this time in Cairo. And so in December 23, 1909, Jacque Groppi opened his first Groppi in Cairo, on al-Manākh Street (Abd al-Khāliq Tharwat Street now), in the Bāb al-Lūq neighborhood, inaugurating a meteoric, and very famous, commercial enterprise. With his wife and son-and-successor, Achille, he turned his business into a successful food industry: he opened a delicatessen, a pig farm, and an ice plant. He also constantly renovated and enlarged his main place on al-Manākh Street, adding a famous patio toward the end of the First World War, during which it became very popular with British army officers and soldiers, and Egyptian effendis alike. Achille Groppi, who then took over the business, expanded the Groppi food industry much more (it was managed through both a public and private holding companies): in 1925, he opened new venues, including the one known today on Suliman

Pasha Square (now Talʿat Ḥarb Square); and even opened a new food chain (*A l'Americaine*). But this part of the Groppi story is beyond the time scope of this study.

Figure 12. Groppi

Left: The first Groppi on al-Manākh Street, near the ʾAzbakiyyah Park in 1905. "Groppi, 1905", Photograph, from Max Karkegi Collections, *L'Egypte d'Antan*
http://www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm

Right: The patio in the first Groppi, early twentieth century. "[Patio at First Groppi, n.d.]", Photograph, from Max Karkegi Collections, *L'Egypte d'Antan*
http://www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm

The Groppi brand was purposefully and explicitly European, high-quality, and innovative. The architecture and internal design of the coffeehouse were French-Italian. It served cakes with Crème Chantilly, and tons of imported *marrons glacé* (candied

chestnuts) from Italy. The expert chefs were brought from France or Italy, and they were tasked by the Groppis to innovate the menus every year. Groppi was geared toward the foreign community in Cairo, but it also served the Egyptian Beys and effendis: in fact, Franco Groppi, the last generation of the family to hold the café, estimated that at least 60 percent of the clientele was Egyptian, despite the great fondness and patronage of British soldiers and the foreign community. (In the Groppi business, farm, and factories, however, upper management was mostly European until the 1970s.) Nevertheless, the Groppis made sure that their prices would always remain affordable for at least the middle class, and the latter indeed took advantage of that.[147]

It should also be emphasized that not all "European" coffeehouses in Cairo were as high-end as Groppi – far from it. Most of the "European" coffeehouses throughout the period were medium to small businesses that catered to the many middle- and working-class "Europeans" and Egyptians in Cairo. This is evident from photographic material, from representations in popular culture, or from such evidence as the destitution of scores of Cypriot and Maltese coffeehouse owners after the Cairo Fire in 1952.[148]

What did the new coffeehouses look like?

Perhaps the most conspicuous differences between the new and the older coffeehouses were in architecture and spatial design. The new coffeehouses were much more specious, and they were usually built on the ground floor of French- or Italian-style grand buildings

---

[147] Interview with Franco Groppi, Geneva, January 25, 2016; Fiechter, *Cent ans*, 237-8.

[148] In 1952, over 43 Cypriots and Maltese – who were British citizens – owning or employed in small coffeehouses and bars filed for damages following the Cairo Fire. Nancy Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 193-4.

that served as offices, residential buildings, or department stores; some were also built as stand-alone buildings in their own right. For their internal layout, they used the system prevalent around the northern Mediterranean (Greece and Italy): they had little tables and chairs, made of metal or wood, strewn about in relative density, as opposed to the Ottoman system, with the *maṣṭabah*-s running along the inner (and outer) walls, and a middle space that was more or less vacant. On the other hand, a common feature of the two layout systems was that in both cases outdoor sitting (frequently under some kind of awning) was as important, if not more so, as indoor sitting. This reclamation of public walkways by coffeehouses was a well-known problem, and successive Egyptian authorities endeavored to limit it, but to no avail.

It should be noted, however, that outdoor sitting was a feature that the new coffeehouses elaborated, and made into a trend. For one thing, since the better ones among them were much more spacious than the older Ottoman coffeehouses, their outdoor sitting space was also larger and more prominent. We already noted Groppi's addition of a back patio in the end of World War I, which became its iconic feature, and attracted many patrons. Cairo's grand hotels also featured outdoor sitting café-style on their terraces: the one at the Shepheard's Hotel became an iconic spot where Egyptian and foreign high-society came to see and to be seen, a veritable public spectacle. Outdoor café-sitting was also created in the ʾAzbakiyyah Park, and other outdoor sports clubs that emerged by the end of the nineteenth century.

Figure 13. Outdoor Cafés

Above: The famous terrace of Shepheard's Hotel in 1910. <u>Source</u>: "Le Caire. Rue Kamel, devant l'hôtel Shepheard's, 1910", Photograph from negative, Max Karkegi Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b531201421

Left: The outdoor café at Jazīrah (Gezira) Sports Club in 1935. <u>Source</u>: "[Gezira Club, 1935]", Photograph, http://geziraclub.club/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/423203_266248163449921_846455648_n-2.jpg

Internal design was perhaps the most conspicuous influence of the new coffeehouses on the old ones. For by the turn of the twentieth century, the old Ottoman design, featuring the *maṣṭabah*-s, was gradually replaced by the little chairs of the FMediterranean/European style, sometimes without using any tables, as we can see in the following photographic evidence.

Figure 14. Photographic postcards showing "Arab coffeehouses" (*qahāwī baladiyyah*), Cairo, turn of the twentieth century. Note that the coffeehouses in the two top postcards still use the wooden *maṣṭabah*-s, while the two below use Mediterranean-style chairs. None are using tables.

Top-Left: "Le Caire, Café Arabe"; **Top-Right**: "Le Caire, Café Arabe"; **Bottom-Left**: "Egyptian Types and Scenes—Arab Coffee-House—Café Arabe"; **Bottom-Right**: "Egyptian Types and Scenes—Café Arabe", Colorized Photographic Postcards, Max Karkegi Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Boîte VZ-1246 (10).

New Categories: Food and Drink

The new coffeehouses brought with them new habits of consumption, not only of drinks,

but also of food, something that was by and large missing from Ottoman coffeehouses,

which did not usually serve food. Serving food in coffeehouses significantly expanded

what a coffeehouse meant, and introduced such hybrid categories as *café-restaurant*, or

café-gelateria. It also created strong associations between coffeehouses and other

institutions that served light fare, such as brasseries and trattorias, as well as between

coffeehouses and small inns or hotels (usually referred to by the Italian term *locanda*).

    In a new, "European," coffeehouse one could get sugared coffee, coffee with milk

(*café au lait*), tea, hot chocolate, and an assortment of cold, sweet, drinks, such as

lemonades. More Ottoman oriented coffeehouses, such as the Muhammad Ali

Coffeehouse in ʾAzbakiyyah, also served elaborate and high-end drinks like *khushāf*, a

chilled and sweetened dry fruit compote, probably of Ottoman origin.[149]

---

[149] Khedival master-spy, Shīmī Bey, reported that first-lieutenant Muhammad Effendi Ẓāhir, an officer of the Palace Police Force, was seen at the Muhammad Ali Coffeehouse in ʾAzbakiyyah on July 27, 1984, drinking *Khushāf* with one of the royals, and then going around some dancing-halls without entering them. Report by Muhammad Saʿīd Shīmī Bey, July 29, 1894, HIL 15/54-62. *Khushāf* was very fondly remembered as a fancy, middle-class, drink to cool down with on a hot summer day by almost any Egyptian I interviewed who remembered Cairo in the 1940s. Today it is mostly enjoyed as a cooling and invigorating drink during Ramadan.

Figure 15. *Khushāf*

As for food items, these usually included European pastries, candies, and ice creams. I already noted above how Groppi served creamed cakes and imported candied chestnuts in the 1890s, and later on expanded to cold meat cuts (delicatessen). By the 1920s, Groppi had a full-menu catering business. As another example, the Italian language press in Egypt during the 1880s and the 1890s was filled with advertisements for coffeehouses that sold different kinds of ice creams (*granita* – shaved ice, *cassata napolitana* – Neapolitan ice cream, fruit ice creams, and more), as well as different kinds of pastries, cakes, and cookies.
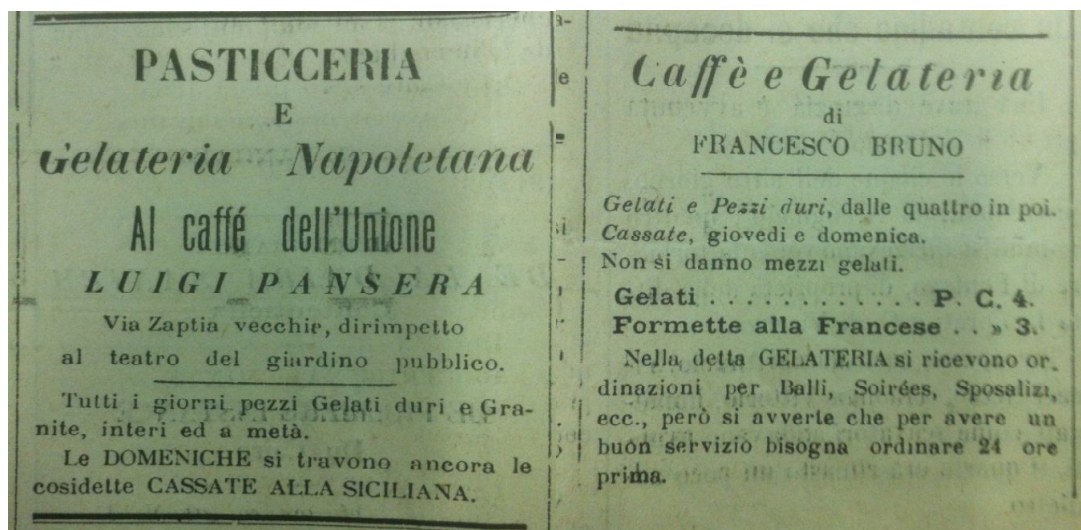
Figure 16. Advertisements for pastry and ice cream in Italian coffeehouses in Cairo, July 1895. **Left**: Pastry and Neapolitan ice cream in Caffé dell'Unione. **Right**: The Caffé and Ice Cream Shop of Francesco Bruno.

L'Imparziale, n. 198, July 17, 1895.

Figure 17. Advertisement for the Café-Restaurant in ʾAzbakiyyah Park (probably Santi), 1872-3.

Levernay, *Guide-Annuaire, 1872-3*.

However, the most significant change that the new coffeehouses brought with them was the reintroduction of alcohol to the coffeehouse scene. As discussed in the previous chapter, coffee and alcohol – and as a result, coffeehouses and wine-taverns (*khamārah*) – had a convoluted history in Egypt. They remained associated with each other, not only in the reprobation of moral critics who attacked the alleged vices they both promoted, but also spatially. That, despite the fact that coffeehouse owners and patrons tried to distance themselves from alcohol and taverns as a more respectable option for socializing. The owners and patrons of the new coffeehouses, a dominant contingent of whom came from the non-Muslim Mediterranean and beyond, reconnected, then, a link between coffeehouses and taverns that was largely severed a few centuries earlier. This, in turn, generated some confusion about categorization: the distinction between a *qahwah* (coffeehouse) and a *khamārah* (tavern), which was once clear to both Muslim and non-Muslims living in Egypt (the latter were dominant, although never exclusively, in the tavern business), became unclear now. Consider, for example, the following public notice, taken from a daily publication about the Khedival theater season, that lists the "principal coffeehouses" in 1874 Cairo, and indicates that most of them served alcohol, fine liqueurs, and beer (especially Viennese beer):
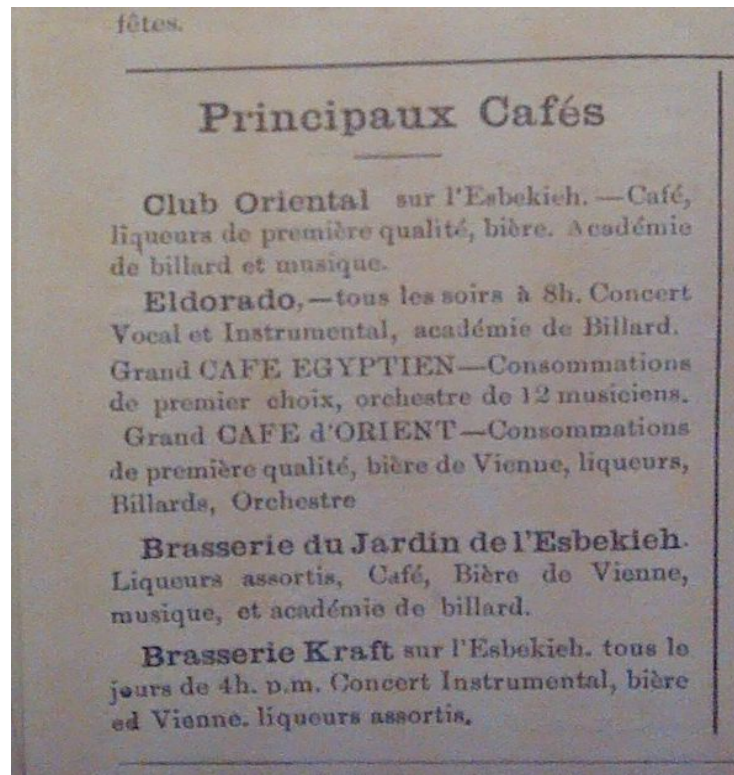
Figure 18. Public notice listing the "principal coffeehouses" in Cairo, noting that most served alcohol and beer.

Le Programme : Journal quotidien contenant les spectacles des théâtres de son altesse le khedive, n. 62, January 8, 1874.

Egyptian police officers, for example, who followed and reported on the ʾAzbakiyyah scene, were not so consistent in their terms. They mostly referred to these places as taverns, but they could also refer to the same place as a tavern and as a coffeehouse, interchangeably in the same police report;[150] one officer referred to a place as a tavern, while another officer referred to the same place as a coffeehouse; a place with

---

[150] See Shīmī Bey writing about *Khamārah ʾilyās* and *Qahwah ʾilyās* (in Alexandria) in the same report: Report by Muhammad Saʿīd Shīmī, HIL 15/54-62, July 29, 1894.

the English word "Bar" in its name (New Bar) could also be referred to as a

coffeehouse;[151] and new hybrid categories were invented altogether, such as *Khamārah-*

Locanda New Bar.[152]

But beyond just issues of taxonomy, the proliferation of alcohol in the

ʾAzbakiyyah scene was highly contested. On the one hand, many in the new urban

middle class, the famed effendiyyah, who lived in and around that new neighborhood,

partook of that scene. This was meticulously described in the surveillance reports of

Khedival master-spy Shīmī Bey, who between 1894 and 1896 took down the names of

Beys and effendis, Egyptian army officers, and state bureaucrats, who got drunk in

ʾAzbakiyyah every night.[153] It is also evident from the many casual references in popular

culture,[154] and the marketing drives of alcohol or Egyptian-manufactured beer.[155]

Moreover, it was very vividly described by its critics in many forms of journalistic

articles, or essayist opprobrium.[156] Indeed, alcohol consumption was heavily critiqued by

people of the very same social class that consumed it. The critique came from many

viewpoints: some pointed out the dangers of alcohol to social values, or to the wellbeing

of the nation, others warned about the dangers to the personal wellbeing of men's mind

---

[151] See *Khamārah* New Bar in: Report by Muhammad Saʿīd Shīmī, HIL 15/191-196, February 13, 1895; and *Qahwah* New Bar in: Unsigned surveillance report to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II, HIL 6/25, January 3, 1908.

[152] See report by Muhammad Saʿīd Shīmī, HIL 15/82-86, August 28, 1894.

[153] See his reports in HIL 15, and further discussion below.

[154] See, for example, the opening scene of the comedy play "*Fahemuh*," depicting a "medium size coffeehouse," run by a Greek and his daughter, where two Beys debate what to order between cold tea or beer. Amin Ṣidqī [for Ali al-Kassār], "*Fahemuh*," in ʾIsmāʿīl, *Masraḥ ʿAlī al-Kassār*, vol. 1, 163-7.

[155] Foda, "The Pyramid and the Crown."

[156] Two very famous fin de siècle social critiques that took up the issue of alcohol consumption, class, and the ʾAzbakiyyah scene are: Muhammad ʿUmar, *Ḥāḍir al-Miṣriyyīn ʾaw Sirr al-Taʾakhkhurihim*, ed. Majdī Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ (Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Miṣrī li-Tawzīʿ al-Maṭbuʿāt, 1998); Muhammad al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadith ʿĪsa ʾibn Hishām*, translated as *A Period of Time*, trans. Roger M.A. Allen (Reading, U.K.: Middle East Centre, 1992).

and body, and some saw alcohol consumption as a challenge to state interests. At no point, then, was alcohol consumption uncontested, even as it gained more ground between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. It might have appealed to some in the middle class or in the elite as "European" or "modern," but it was also rejected by others of the same classes. Thus, alcohol consumption is a case in point for showing that not any socio-cultural habit from Europe was necessarily and automatically accepted in Egypt, even when it was supposedly marked (unsuccessfully? not completely?) with a high social symbolic value.

How, then, did the new foodways introduced by the new coffeehouses influenced those of the older coffeehouses, if at all? By and large, lower-class coffeehouses in the old neighborhoods remained alcohol and food free during the time period discussed in this study, which did not mean that they were not easily available from nearby, as before. Nevertheless, there were some significant changes in consumption habits. For one thing, if, as noted in the previous chapter, Egyptians thought the French habit of sugaring their coffee was ridiculous at the beginning of the nineteenth century, then by the end of it they adopted that practice. Sugar, however, was not served separately to individual clients, but was boiled with the coffee. That required clients to order the coffee with the desired degree of sweetness (a habit known to this day): *qahwah sādah* (black coffee), was unsugared coffee; *qahwah maẓbūṭa* (coffee done "just right") was moderately sugared; and *qahwah ziyādah* was an extra-sweetened coffee. Another significant addition to the modest fare of the old coffeehouses was tea, which became ubiquitous there by the end of the nineteenth century, alongside coffee. Cold, sweetened, drinks, such as lemonades and

fruit juices, remained a staple in the old coffeehouses as well, alongside the sugared

coffee and tea.

Gender and Entertainment in the ʾAzbakiyyah Scene

New Forms of Elite Entertainment in ʾAzbakiyyah

The new coffeehouses, primarily in ʾAzbakiyyah, introduced new hybrid categories not

only in terms of foodways, but also in terms of entertainment: they introduced to Cairo

the French establishments of *café-dansant* (dancing halls) and *café-chantant* (music

halls). These places should be understood in two converging contexts: one is the recently

introduced forms of elite entertainment from Europe, in music, dance, and theater. The

other context is the transformed presence of women in public places, especially as

entertainers and sex workers, changes that produced much anxiety and consternation

among male critics.

The inauguration of the Khedival Opera House in 1869, together with the

Khedival theaters, a circus, even a zoo – all around the ʾAzbakiyyah Park or the nearby

ʿAtabah Square – ostensibly marked the most blatant examples of cultural importation.

Their architecture was mostly Italian, and so was the music in the Opera House; the

theaters, when not presenting plays in French, presented translated plays from French

(into Arabic); the performing troupes were brought from Italy, and sometimes from

France, often through Istanbul, or in competition with Istanbul (later on, Syrian-Ottoman

troupes came to dominate the scene). Nevertheless, the elite foreigners who lived in Cairo

were only one part of the targeted audience: most of it was comprised of the Khedive himself, his family, and his Ottoman elite. As Adam Mestyan argued, the performances of Italian (and some French) music at the Khedival Opera House were designed, or used, by Khedive Ismail and his successors to project their own power to their elites, as well as to their Ottoman, and later British, overlords. Those symbolic events were also meant to consolidate the social networks of those elites, and imbue them with a local, Egyptian-Ottoman, collective identity, centered around the Khedive.[157]

To the music and singing in the Khedival Opera House, we must add the dancing balls in the grand hotels of ʾAzbakiyyah that were opened in increasing numbers since the 1850s by British, French, Italian, Greek, and other Ottoman entrepreneurs. World famous hotels such as Shepheard's, Continental, and Gezira Palace, catered to rapidly growing numbers of tourists that visited Egypt since the mid-nineteenth century: if in 1873 Cook & Son, the travelling company that dominated the Egyptian market, brought about 500 tourists to the country, then in the winter season of 1889-90 it was closer to 11000.[158] This growth owed much to the steamship and railways that shortened travelling time, as well as to the growing phenomenon of global travel. Tourism was supported by an industry of guides and travelers' accounts, as well as by travel companies such as Cook & Son that organized all aspects of travel, and also built the necessary transport and hospitality infrastructure. It marketed Cairo as a winter resort, and indeed most of the tourists during the last quarter of the century were British or American. The grand hotels that were designed and furnished in European style and fitted with gas lighting and *en-*

---

[157] Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*.
[158] Andrew Humphreys, *Grand Hotels of Egypt in the Golden Age of Travel* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 12.

suite bathrooms, became the focal point for the social life of elite tourists (whether staying for a short time or for the whole season), as well as for British high-level administrators and officers, and a few other foreigners. At the center of this social life were their weekly dancing balls, where men and women danced and socialized together.[159]

The Cafés-Dansant, and *Cafés-Chantant*

It was in the space between the elitist Opera House and the grand dancing balls of the European hotels, on the one hand, and the local, Egyptian, traditions of outdoor street performances described in the previous chapter, on the other, that the *café-dansants* and *café-chantants* came in. As can be seen in the above advertisement for "principal coffeehouses" in Cairo taken from an 1874 journal, almost all of those coffeehouses offered alcohol, orchestra, and singers. For another example, consider this advertisement for a midnight masquerade ball in the Grand Café d'Orient, which allowed women to get in for free.

---

[159] Ibid.

Figure 19. Advertisement for a grand dance ball in Grand Café d'Orient: "Entrée libre pour les Dames."

Le Programme : Journal quotidien contenant les spectacles des théâtres de son altesse le khedive, n. 62, January 8, 1874.

Such advertisement in an 1870s, French-language, review of the Khedival theaters probably targeted men – and women – of the foreign community, residents or tourists, and whomever in the Ottoman-Egyptian elite who shared their culture of mix-gender dancing in public (indications are that they were not many, at that point in time). By the 1890s, however, the *cafés-dansant*, *cafés-chantant*, and *cafés-concert* of ʾAzbakiyyah also attracted a very different crowd of men, looking for very different kinds of

entertainment. The exponential growth in the population of the city, a result of high immigration both from overseas and from rural Egypt, the public transportation (tram) hub that was built at ʿAtabah Square, which ferried a large population to and from the neighborhood every day, and the concentration of urban middle class (effendiyyah) residents in ʾAzbakiyyah and the surrounding neighborhoods, all made it a prominent spot for entertainment.

Probably hundreds, if not more, of coffeehouses-cum-dance/music-halls, as well as taverns, big and small, opened in ʾAzbakiyyah during that time, and the taxonomic lines between them were very thin, or non-existent. Some of the most prominent names on the scene were the ever-popular Eldorado, New Bar, Bodega, Bosphore, and Luna Park, but there were others with Arabic names as well, such as Takht al-Banāt, al-Kūkār, or al-Kishk.[160] The ones which offered live music or dance, had a stage on which bands of musicians and singers, most of whom were women, performed. The bands played European, Arab-Egyptian, or Ottoman music, according to audiences and circumstances: the Grand Café Egyptien, for example, had in the end of the 1880s "a band of Bohemian Girls," while the famous Eldorado had "Arabian dancing-girls."[161] Those stage performances probably contributed to some formalization of popular Egyptian music and dance, and allowed a certain European influence on them.[162]

---

[160] Report from Shīmī Bey, November 19, 1894, HIL 15/131-136.
[161] Hallil J. Kemeid, *Cairo and Egypt: Life in the Land of the Pharaohs*, 2nd ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall Ltd., 1898-9), 46.
[162] Van Nieuwkerk, *"A Trade Like Any Other,"* 36-45.
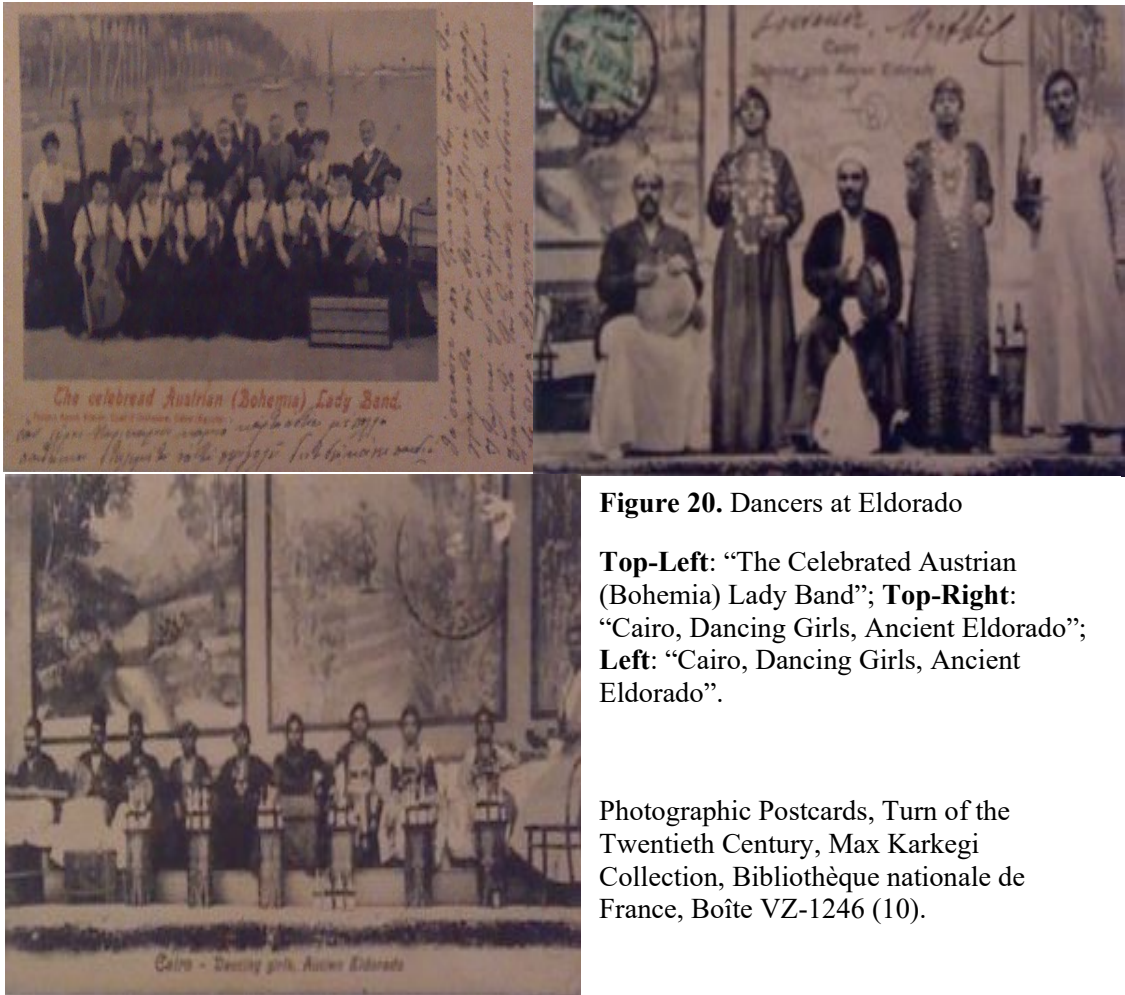
Figure 20. Dancers at Eldorado

Top-Left: "The Celebrated Austrian (Bohemia) Lady Band"; **Top-Right**: "Cairo, Dancing Girls, Ancient Eldorado"; **Left**: "Cairo, Dancing Girls, Ancient Eldorado".

Photographic Postcards, Turn of the Twentieth Century, Max Karkegi Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Boîte VZ-1246 (10).

However, the female musicians, singers, and dancers, also had the task of mingling with the male clientele and enticing them to order more alcohol. They spent long hours sitting and drinking with them, while being sexually suggestive. The more alcohol ordered to the table was, the more money the venue, and the individual performer, made. For many Egyptian men, these female performers were nothing more than plain prostitutes, although it is questionable whether transactional sex actually took place on the premises of such coffeehouses, taverns and halls. If such a situation developed, transactional sex probably took place elsewhere: outdoor, in a brothel, or in the client's apartment. It means that those performers might have had a slightly bigger degree of control over the choice whether to proceed with transactional sex or not.[163]

---

[163] Van Nieuwkerk, *"A Trade Like Any Other,"* 40-9; Abd al-Wahāb Bakr, *Mujtamaʿ al-Qāhirah al-Sirrī, 1900-1951* [Cairo's Secret Society, 1900-1951] (Cairo: Al-ʿArabī lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2001), 95-115.
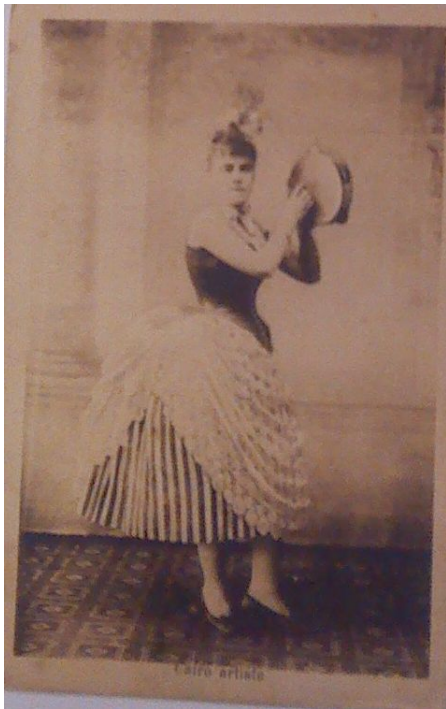
Figure 21. Dancers.

Top-Left: "La danse du ventre"; **Top-Right**: "Egypt—Cairo Dancing Girl"; **Left**: "Caire artiste". Note the different costumes of the dancers.

Photographic Postcards, Turn of the Twentieth Century, Max Karkegi Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Boîte VZ-1246 (10).

The Critique of Alcohol Consumption and Prostitution

The ʾAzbakiyyah scene quickly became a major national concern, and the focus of widespread criticism. On almost every platform, public intellectuals and writers of different stripes, be it religious, reformist, nationalist, or other, attacked the vices of ʾAzbakiyyah, and its detrimental effects for Egyptian society, nation, and the morals of men. This elaborate discourse centered on the consumption of alcohol, and the proliferation of prostitution. In a typical critique of alcohol consumption, nationalist intellectual Abdallah al-Nadīm (1845-1896) wrote that "drinking wine, which became an entrenched habit like [drinking] coffee among good people," destroyed one's body and mind, put thousands of people in lunatic asylums across Europe, fleeced people of their money, and was part of a greater, regrettable, trend of blindly imitating the foreigners (ʾAfranj), much like imitating their fashions (which was inadequate for the Egyptian climate anyway).[164] Note here the age-old distinction between alcohol and coffee, the drink of "good people," and the challenge to the attempts at normalizing alcohol consumption among the higher-classes.

Famous author Muhammad al-Muwayliḥī (1868-1930) in his influential social critique, first serialized in the newspaper *Miṣbaḥ al-Sharq* between 1898 and 1900 as "Fatrah min al-Zaman" (A Period of Time), echoed similar concerns when he described, in vivid detail, the shenanigans that took place in ʾAzbakiyyah's dance-halls. He depicted the patrons of one "foul smelling" – that is, a public health hazard – dance-hall as addicts,

---

[164] Abdallah al-Nadīm al-ʾIdrisī, "Fukahāt" [Raillery], *Al-ʾUstādh*, n. 2, August 30, 1892, 46-8.

and its famous dancing star as an "ugly whore." After her disgusting dance number, she spent the evening going around the tables of influential and respectable men (a provincial governor, a shaykh, a teacher, a provincial headman), guided by an assistant, and guarded by a Moroccan "husband"-for-hire (his foreign nationality legally protected her). She drank large amounts of alcohol with them, making considerable gain for the establishment and for herself. She teased the men, who all worshiped her and lost all their money and good name over her. She did not, however, "go home" with any of them (she had her own lover). Al-Muwayliḥī was also fair enough to describe the harsh reality in which a "whore" like her lived and worked, and blamed the government for allowing such places to operate in the center of the capital. He argued that it contradicted the policies of other governments in the world, Islamic or not (such as England's), which either banned such places completely, or at least made sure that they would be located in the outskirts of the city, and not where respectable people lived.[165]

Thus, the *cafés-dansants*, taverns, and brothels of ʾAzbakiyyah became emblematic for a middle-class, male, discourse that implicated alcohol consumption and prostitution in the moral and corporal degeneration of that class, and by extension, of the Egyptian nation. These practices were deemed responsible for their practitioners' financial ruin, for threats to the Egyptian family unit and to gender relations, for threats to the governmentability of the state, and for the economic exploitation of the country by foreigners.[166] Such discourse propelled the British colonial administration and the Egyptian government to take some action to limit, control, and regulate those practices in

---

[165] Al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadith ʿĪsa ʾibn Hishām*, 321-44.

[166] For more on this discourse, see: Prestel, *Emotional Cities*, 107-35; Francesca Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains Around Us": Sex Work in Colonial Cairo, 1882-1952" (PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012), 199-229.

ʾAzbakiyyah. Different laws and regulations were issued from 1882 onwards, culminating in an 1896 comprehensive law, that licensed and taxed brothels and prostitutes, subjected them to regular medical inspections, limited their hours of operation, and their location.[167] Alcohol was also licensed.[168] Ultimately, these measures did very little to curtail alcohol consumption and prostitution: they actually continued to grow after World War I, and with it also the public critique; stricter laws and measures of control had to be introduced, until prostitution was prohibited altogether in 1949.[169] Nevertheless, the strong association of the ʾAzbakiyyah scene with lewd forms of leisure and entertainment must have contributed to its gradual demise, which was manifest in the relocation of grand hotels and businesses westwards or to its south-west, and in the rise of the coffeehouse scene in Bāb al-Lūq.

Master-Spy Shīmī Bey and the Critical Discourse of the ʾAzbakiyyah Scene

Someone who must have been among the target middle-class audience for the admonitions of ʾAzbakiyyah's vices was police officer Muhammad Saʿīd Shīmī Bey. An officer in the Cairo Police, he was also a long-time master-spy for the Khedival family.[170] From his reports to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II (r. 1892-1914) between the years 1894 and 1898, written as personal letters,[171] we can see how Shīmī Bey used his network of informers to report about mismanagement and corruption in important government

---

[167] Biancani, "Sex Work," 160-83.
[168] Foda, "The Pyramid and the Crown," 144-5.
[169] Biancani, "Sex Work," 229-76.
[170] There is some indication that by 1902 Shīmī Bey was promoted to an unclear but influential position at the palace. HIL 28/132, May 7, 1902.
[171] He regularly opened each report with a salutary address in flowery Arabic.

ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of the Interior, or the Cairo Police. He also used a network of informers to report about the situation in the provinces outside Cairo.[172] In addition, a constant feature in his almost daily reports was a very detailed description, including names, exact times, and exact locations, of Egyptian army and police officers, as well as civilian officials, getting drunk and rowdy (fī ḥālah ʿarbadah wa-sukr), while fooling around with prostitutes, in the coffeehouses, taverns, and dance halls of ʾAzbakiyyah. A typical report, which demonstrates a typical itinerary of an evening out in ʾAzbakiyyah, as well as how thin the taxonomic lines between its various establishments were, read:

> "On Sunday, August 26, 1894 the following officers were drunk, while a beardless young boy [shāb ʾamrad] was with them as a drinking companion [nadīm]: Lieutenant-Colonel [Bikbāshī] Darwīsh effendi Rifʿat, Captain [Yūzbāshī] Khalīl effendi Ḥamdī, and First-Lieutenant [Mulāzim ʾAwwal] Muhammad effendi Ḥasan. They were all in the Bosphore tavern [khamārah] from 2 until 9 that evening. Then they left and went to Eldorado, but did not stay there more than 5 minutes. They left in a car to an unknown destination with their drinking companion… On that same Sunday, at 4:30 in the evening, Muhammad bey Ṭāhir from the Palace was riding a car, [license] number 11, to al-Jazīrah; the chauffeur's name was Mursī. He was catcalling women walking in the streets. A policeman took the car's number. At 6 o'clock, he got out of the car and started going into tavern after coffeehouse [min khamāra li-qahwah], while the car was waiting for him, until he got to al-Kahrabāʾ tavern. He entered and drank wine. Then he got out and took the car to ʾAzbakiyyah at 7 o'clock. Lieutenant Hasan bey Ḥasīb from the mounted police was waiting for him there, and they went through all the taverns and bars [al-khamāmīr wal-biriyāt], drinking alcohol as they liked. At 8 o'clock they went to the tavern and inn [khamārah wa-lūkāndah] New Bar, and had dinner there. They drank more wine at dinner, which goes well with foreign food. When dinner was over they drank

---

[172] For an example of a comprehensive report about events in many of those different governmental departments, see: Report from Shīmī Bey, October 28, 1894, HIL 15/116-23. The file HIL 16 contains the original reports of his informers in the provinces, which he summarized for the Khedive. Examining them against Shīmī's digests would make an interesting study case about the flow of information at the very top of Egypt's government at the time, as well as a study about the administration of its provinces. More generally, Shīmī Bey's reports can be studied for an intimate, day-to-day, look at how the Egyptian bureaucracy adapted to the colonial realities of the 1890s, when more and more British (and other) administrators and "advisers" took positions in it.

cognac and parted ways. He then took the car to al-Laymūn Bridge and boarded a steamboat."[173]

Shīmī's conflation between the different venues is also evident from his referring to the same place, once as a coffeehouse, and once as a tavern; from his mentioning of coffeehouses located right next to taverns; or from his critique of "the coffeehouses and the places of entertainment" (al-qahāwī wal-malāhī) as a whole.[174]

Shīmī saw the proliferation of alcohol and prostitution in these places as a state problem. For him, the involvement of army officers and government officials in that kind of practices was not becoming of their position: it was a dereliction of duty, and a danger to the authority of the state.[175] He clearly saw the state as responsible for this problem, and his constant reporting to the Khedive about it was meant to engender some state action against it. In a letter to the Khedive from July 1894, he made the point that the 1885 decree on prostitution, promulgated by Abd al-Qādir pasha Ḥilmī, Minister of the Interior, officially sanctioned prostitution, much to the consternation of the populace. His interpretation contradicts scholarly explanations that see this law and others like it as an attempt to control the phenomenon.[176] Shīmī protested that the law allowed respectable women (ḥurmah) over the age of 20, who wanted to open a brothel, to do so by applying for a license and paying the necessary fees, without any regard to her family's feelings. Women even reported their families to the authorities when they tried to confront them,

---

[173] Report from Shīmī Bey, August 28, 1894, HIL 15/82-6.
[174] Report from Shīmī Bey, July 29, 1894, HIL 15/54-62; December 6, 1894, HIL 15/146-51; February 22, 1895, HIL 15/197-201; August 25, 1898, HIL 15/484-92.
[175] Reports from Shīmī Bey, July 29, 1894, HIL 15/54-62; August 3, 1894, HIL 15/63-7; March 6, 1895, HIL 15/295-300.
[176] See: Biancani, "Sex Work," 166-70.

and the governorate took assurances from the families that they would not confront these women anymore. Shīmī expressed the hope that the cabinet would consider family honor in this case.[177]

A peculiar feature of the discourse against prostitution in ʾAzbakiyyah was that the onus of the situation – its causes, effects, and the people who were tasked with remedying it – was all put on men rather than on women. This contrasts later, even current, trends in Egyptian social critique that put the blame for promiscuousness, for sexual harassment, or for dishonoring one's family, squarely on the body of women, on its covering, on women's behavior, and on the lack of gender segregation. Even when describing the show of a dancer-cum-prostitute, al-Muwayliḥī made a point to emphasize her ugliness, so his fictionalized characters could argue that it was not her body that attracted the men in her audience to the dancing hall.[178] It is certainly true that this kind of critical discourse about promiscuousness and prostitution was a conversation between men, in which the voices of women were not heard, and in which women were but objects to be acted upon, for example, with routine medical tests. But in a paradoxical way it also deflected the blame away from women and put it on men.

---

[177] Letter from Shīmī Bey to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II, July 23, 1894, HIL 15/49-50.
[178] Al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadith ʿĪsa ʾibn Hishām*, 321-44.

Figure 22. "The scene of a short-sighted man [an effendi sitting in a coffeehouse] who puts on his glasses whenever a young woman or a lady passes him by, or sits near him, so he can blame it on her"

A caricature in *Al-Muṣawwar*, no. 1444, June 13, 1952

Nevertheless, reading against the grain and in between the lines of Shīmī's report reveals a picture of women taking independent business initiatives against family pressure, or against societal constructs of family honor. In several reports, he gave a vivid example of such agency and power, describing Shafīqah al-Qibṭiyyah (Shafīqah the Copt), owner of the Takht al-Banāt dance hall, who was very successful at winning the affections of a number of powerful men, who quarreled over her. Among them were the British commandant of Cairo's police, Mansfield, and his men, in whose office Shafīqah

used to sit all day long, receiving visitors and conducting her business there. Shīmī was clearly impressed by the power that Shafīqah yielded, and by her success in getting the police on her side, so she could continue conducting her business.[179]

It also seems that Shīmī painted most of the women in his reports with too wide a brush when he mostly referred to them as prostitutes and harlots (mūmisah, fawāḥish). Although there definitely was a sizeable commercial sex industry in ʾAzbakiyyah, he also described practices that were probably associated by their practitioners at the time with changes in how men and women enjoyed their leisure together in public. In his letter to the Khedive cited above, he did mention that the women who applied for "brothel" licenses were respectable ones. Moreover, as an example for the harm caused to families and parents when "a woman leaves it for indecency [fuḥsh]," he wrote about a respected chemistry professor who died when both his daughters went out "to the brothels in the same day," dancing in the ʾAzbakiyyah Coffeehouse among other beautiful ladies.[180] Note the conflation between brothels and coffeehouses, and more importantly, the conflation between prostitution and what seems as two young women taking advantage of newly introduced practices of dancing together with men in public. Shīmī also frowned upon such practices as men and women walking arm in arm in public "like the foreigners [ʾafranj] do."[181] Of course, he was careful not to call women of high status harlots, not

---

[179] On Shafīqah al-Qibṭiyyah, see: Reports from Shīmī Bey, June 5, 1894, HIL 15/14-5; June 9, 1894, HIL 15/21-2; July 19, 1894, HIL 15/53; March 23, 1895, HIL 15/212-6. See also Shīmī's report on Fāṭimah Bint Abdallah, a black Sudanese woman from Būlāq, who had a similar influence on Mansfield, so much so, that people who had issues with the police settled them through her, a service for which she charged money: Report from Shīmī Bey, September 9, 1896, HIL 15/451-5. Van Nieuwkerk mentioned Shafīqah al-Qibṭiyyah as a very famous and rich dancer who by the 1920s owned her own, respectable, dance hall: Van Nieuwkerk, *"A Trade Like Any Other,"* 43.
[180] Letter from Shīmī Bey to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II, July 23, 1894, HIL 15/49-50.
[181] Report from Shīmī Bey, July 29, 1894, HIL 15/54-62.

English women, whom he called "ladies" (sitt), and certainly not the princesses from the Khedival family, whose escapades he described.[182]

Shīmī Bey's reports about ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses and taverns also draw attention to homosexual relations. Several of them mentioned men enjoying their time in the coffeehouses and taverns with "beardless boys" (ʾamrad) – a term denoting prepubescence or pre-manhood – or with "beautiful boys" (al-ʾawlād al-luṭāf), often drinking alcohol with them, sometimes even kissing them.[183] The matter of fact manner in which Shīmī noted those relations in the midst of reporting about men and women in ʾAzbakiyyah testifies to their ubiquity, especially in the context of sexually-laden entertainment, and reiterates the position of prepubescent boys as sexually available for men.[184]

It did not, however, denote acceptability: frolicking around with boys was as unacceptable as frolicking around with women who were not one's wives. A certain governor who was seen walking around Būrṣah Street with a boy generated gossip about

---

[182] See his report about Princess Zaynab Hānim, who went out to a certain woman's apartment, where she met with a Greek man of bad reputation. Shīmī mentioned that there were a few other women who arranged such encounters between respectable ladies (ḥurīmāt, sic.) and young men in their homes. Princess Zaynab was also in the scandalous habit of leaving her carriage and walking about the streets of Cairo, chaperoned only by one of her ladies-in-waiting: Reports from Shīmī Bey, May 26, 1894, HIL 15/4-5; July 29, 1894, HIL 15/54-62. See also his reports about Princess Jamīlah Hānim's escapades with Ṭāhir Bey, a translator from the Palace, to "the mountains" (al-Muqaṭṭam Hills), or his reports about her frequent visits to the spas in Ḥilwān, and not necessarily for their hot springs: Reports from Shīmī Bey, June 11, 1894, HIL 15/28; June 19, 1894, HIL 15/36; February 20, 1895, HIL 15/207. About Beys and Pashas drinking and sitting in company with foreign women or English ladies, see: Reports from Shīmī Bey, September 7, 1894, HIL 15/87-92; August 17, 1895, HIL 15/294. More on the so-called "secret brothels," private apartments where men met women of high social status for sex, see: Report from Shīmī Bey, September 9, 1896, HIL 15/451-5; Biancani, "Sex Work," 121-33.

[183] Reports from Shīmī Bey, July 1894, HIL 15/51-2; August 3, 1894, HIL 15/63-7; August 28, 1894, HIL 15/82-6; September 7, 1894, HIL 15/87-92; November 19, 1894, HIL 15/131-6.

[184] See Shīmī Bey's report about Ali effendi Muḥrim, the manager of Minyā Train Station, who was prone to drinking and gambling, and used to bring two female dancers-prostitutes, Zahrah and Ṣalūḥ, to dance at his house, even though he already had a boy there, named Abd al-Ḥamīd from Bandar al-Minyā: Report from Shīmī Bey, August 3, 1894, HIL 15/63-7.

his honor from "Arabs and foreigners" alike; and one Khūrshid effendi, a clerk at the Prosecution of al-Minyā, was criticized by Shīmī as a *maʾbūn* (a man preferring to be sexually penetrated) who was taken advantage of by the servants and doormen (note a certain class anxiety here as well).[185] In fact, the practice of courting boys, when they were not from a particularly weak socio-economic background, was highly contested: Ahmad effendi Zuhnī, the new police adjutant of al-Wāylī neighborhood in 1896, got into a physical altercation in front of Gregory Coffeehouse with a Jewish khawājah named "Mūshīn" (probably Moschino), who accused him of luring his son to his home for his sinful purposes.[186]

Locating those adolescent males alongside women in ʾAzbakiyyah offers a corrective to theories about homo-sociality: enjoying the companionship of boys in ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses and taverns at the turn of the twentieth century was taking place in the context of a disintegrating order of gender-segregation, which had engendered homo-social practices. It should also be noted that those adolescent males were not the cross-dressing male dancers, who seemingly were going out of fashion by that time, and their presence in the highly sexualized atmosphere of ʾAzbakiyyah alongside women does not suggest that they were considered of the same gender, only that they were considered as legitimate targets for men's sexual desires as women were.

The entertainment scene of ʾAzbakiyyah, including its new kinds of coffeehouses, became, then, a space where social practices of gender segregation changed dramatically. This was a space where men and women of the colonial elite, or European (mainly

---

[185] Reports from Shīmī Bey, n.d., HIL 15/34; August 3, 1894, HIL 15/63-7.
[186] Report from Shīmī Bey, August 25, 1896, HIL 15/410-23.

British) tourists, socialized and enjoyed their leisure together, in the grand hotels, coffeehouses, restaurants, and dancing halls; this was also a space to which non-elite European and Egyptian men flocked, in order to enjoy the leisurely activities available to them, activities that involved heavy drinking and prostitution, or heavily sexualized socializing. The two forms of entertainment shared the same urban space, and should be understood together: any study of prostitution alone, in that particular space and time, would miss an important part of its social context. Critiques from that time did not miss the connection either: in his fictionalized social critique, al-Muwayliḥī followed his characters through a night out in ʾAzbakiyyah, walking from ʾAzbakiyyah Park, to a "meeting hall" (probably a coffeehouse), a restaurant, a tavern, and finally to a dance hall. On their way to the tavern, they passed by one of the grand hotels, and they noticed rich European tourists and colonizers, "men mingling freely with women… sitting opposite each other and lounging on sofas… having forgotten the difference between the sexes, they proceed to get on intimate terms with their fellow humans." From there, the heroes of the story continued to drink heavily in a tavern, and then enjoy a highly sexualized dance show in one of the dance halls.[187]

In this way, practices of mixed-gender socializing in public, exercised by elite European, mainly British, tourists and colonial administrators, inspired changes in practices of gender segregation among Egyptians. That influence, however, was uneven across the social hierarchy, and, once again, highly contested. Princesses of the Khedival family might have ventured outside their palaces for their amorous affairs, but not usually to public places (except for Princess Zaynab who liked strolling down the street). Other

---

[187] Al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadith ʿĪsā ʾibn Hishām*, 313-4.

elite Muslim women stayed away from such establishments as well: feminist leader, Huda Shaʿrāwī (1879-1947), recalled that a European older lady once tried to convince her to go out to a coffeehouse, but she, Shaʿrāwī, adamantly refused. She claimed that going out into public places like that was not in accordance with "our customs and mores," and she framed the whole episode as some kind of a test of character. I suspect, however, that class also had something to do with it, as elite men, too, did not usually frequent coffeehouses.[188]

Unlike elite Muslim women, a few young women from the effendiyyah class, like the daughters of the chemistry professor, might have dared to participate in those dance balls in ʾAzbakiyyah. But most non-elite women in ʾAzbakiyyah, Egyptian or foreign, Muslim or Christian, were associated with the prostitution industry. Thus, the presences and absences of women from coffeehouses and associated establishments in end-of-nineteenth-century ʾAzbakiyyah were also informed by social hierarchy, power, wealth, and occupation.

Finally, ʾAzbakiyyah also engendered a fundamental change in popular entertainment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, female (and male) singers and dancers (*ghawāzī*) previously performed in public, outdoor, settings, such as saint festivals (*mawālid*) or markets, and that included the outdoor spaces in front of coffeehouses where men gathered. Thus, the new *cafés-chantant* quite literally brought them inside the coffeehouse, and put them on a stage. That move contributed to the regularization and formalization of the profession, the performances, and their content. It

---

[188] Huda Shaʿrāwī, *Mudhakirāt Huda Shaʿrāwī* [Memoirs of Huda Shaʿrāwī], electronic reproduction (Cairo: Kutub ʿArabiyyah, 2007), 119-21.

must have been instrumental in the rise of the popular music scene and its female stars, such as Munīrah al-Mahdiyyah (1885-1965), or Umm Kulthūm (1898-1975), both of whom performed in coffeehouses at the beginning of their career. The introduction of the affordable gramophone in the first years of the twentieth century, made those stars popular all over Egypt. Recruiters from the recording industry used to scout the coffeehouses for new singers and comedians. In fact, gramophones became so affordable that small coffeehouses that could not afford live singers bought or rented gramophones to play music by popular demand (there were also roving gramophone owners who rented them by the hour).[189] These new forms of entertainment eventually pushed out major old forms, chief among them the story-tellers: Naguib Mahfouz's first novel, *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (Midaq Alley), published in 1947, poignantly opens with the final banishment of the last *ḥakawātī* in Cairo from the alley's coffeehouse, in favor of the radio that the owner was installing.[190]

The New Coffeehouses, Europeanization, and Social Distinction

Two Views of the New Coffeehouses, and the Construct of "European" Style

The new coffeehouses were associated, then, with European styles, by virtue of their location in the new parts of Cairo, their architecture and internal design, their foodways, the entertainment they offered, the socio-cultural codes that their patrons performed (such

---

[189] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 143-6.
[190] Mahfouz, *Zuqāq al-Midaq*, 6-8

as dress codes, etc.), and by virtue of an exaggerated, stereotyped, view of their owners and clientele. How were those views and associations constructed?

A lesser known British tourist guide, but already in its second edition in 1889, suggested to British tourists several walking tours in Cairo off the beaten path. Its first walking tour started at the Shepheard's Hotel, "the principal European centre," and lead through the ʾAzbakiyyah Park

> "where on certain evenings a British military band plays to as motley a throng of all nationalities as it would be possible to collect anywhere. We pass several large cafés, which give to this part of Cairo the appearance of a city in Southern Europe. There is little to remind us of the East except the tarbushes, which are worn not only by the black-coated Effendis, Turkish or Egyptian, but also by many of the French, Italian, Greek, and Levantine population; in the midst of these, however, we may see a fellah in felt skull cap and cotton gown, driving in from the country a few donkeys or carrying a basket of geese, exactly as he was represented in the tombs at Sakkara some thousands of years ago."[191]

Beyond the quite Orientalist imagery of the fellah, note the author's association of the coffeehouses in ʾAzbakiyyah with a specific Southern European, as opposed to an all-European, culture. To put it in context, we should remember that the towns of the French and Italian rivieras were major destinations for British winter tourism: another British guide from the same time, clearly geared towards the very elite of British tourists, compared Cairo to such resorts as Cannes and Malta, or to Simla (Shimla), the British summer capital in colonial-era India, due to the large presence of British colonial administrators and army officers. This tourist guide curtly remarked that the few *cafés-*

---

[191] Lieut.-General G. T. Plunkett, R. E., *Walks in Cairo: A Guide to the Most Picturesque Streets and Buildings in the Capital of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (London: Richardson & Co., 1889), 5.

chantant in Cairo were "inferior," and that the "Arabian cafés [were] very numerous, but scarcely worth visiting."[192] These somewhat haughty, and very imperially British, descriptions deconstruct the "all-European" label often ascribed to its so-called cosmopolitan culture, and emphasize its Mediterranean and Ottoman constituents.

Consider too, the assertion that the tarbush, the ultimate symbol of the effendiyyah, was worn not only by "Egyptians and Turks" (Ottomans), but also by "a motley throng" of Mediterranean immigrants from France, Italy, Greece, and the Levant, or in other words, these immigrants were part of the coffeehouse-going effendiyyah as well. Once again, such descriptions highlight ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses as an urban space where immediate, meaningful, and constant, socio-cultural contacts between Egyptians and other Mediterraneans were made, building of course on a long history of such contacts.

How did members of this very diverse group itself view Cairo's coffeehouses? Bishārah Taqlā, co-founder of *Al-ʾAhrām*, the most circulated newspaper in Egypt, himself a Shāmī (Levantine, Syrian) Greek Catholic who immigrated to Egypt, embarked in late 1881 on a journey that started in Istanbul and continued to the major cities of Eastern and Central Europe (most of which were with an Ottoman historical background). In his travel accounts, serialized in *Al-ʾAhrām*, he described what he considered to be the fundamental characteristics of grand cities. He discussed buildings and architecture, streets and how wide they were, public gardens and their size (usually compared to ʾAzbakiyyah), the promenades, train stations, numbers of schools, museums, theaters and dance halls, the newspapers, whether men and women socialized together in

---

[192] Kemeid, *Cairo and Egypt*, 45, 55.

public, and of course, the hotels, restaurants, and coffeehouses. He was especially attuned to the size and cleanliness of those coffeehouses, and what they offered in terms of refreshment, relaxation, and sociability.[193] One very instructive comparison he made with Cairo's coffeehouses was in his description of Beyoglu in Istanbul, a part of that city that can be compared to ʾAzbakiyyah in terms of its large foreign population, its international commercial activity, and its adoption of "European" styles. In this column, Taqlā complained about the egregiously high prices in the hotels and coffeehouses of Beyoglu compared to Cairo, especially as the food and drink there were "tasteless." Moreover, Taqlā asserted that the essential nature of that fare, and by extension those coffeehouses, was "lost, because they did not leave it Oriental [sharqī], nor did they perfect it as exclusively European [ʾifranjī], so it became 'in-between' [bayn bayn], lacking in both elements."[194] For an effendi opinion maker like Taqlā, then, sizable, clean, refreshing, affordable, and sociable coffeehouses were essential to any grand city; but more importantly, he saw a fundamental distinction between European- and Oriental-style coffeehouses, and he did not care for any hybridity (which is much celebrated in nostalgia and scholarship on cosmopolitanism).

The Effendiyyah and its Coffeehouses

Why keeping the distinction between the European and Oriental "essences" of different coffeehouses – both of which were broadly and stereotypically construed – was so

---

[193] See the series "Tābiʿ al-Siyāḥah" [Following the Journey] by Bishārah Taqlā in *Al-ʾAhrām*, no. 261, August 18, 1881; no. 262, August 25, 1881; no. 266, September 22, 1881; no. 268, October 6, 1881.
[194] Bishārah Taqlā, "Tābiʿ al-Siyāḥah: Al-ʾIstānah al-ʿUlya" [Following the Journey: Grand Istanbul], *Al-ʾAhrām*, no. 162 [sic.: 262], August 25, 1881.

important to Bishārah Taqlā? The answer must be found in the strategies that the new social group he belonged to, the effendiyyah, used to carve out their position in the social hierarchy.

As Lucie Ryzova showed, the nineteenth and twentieth century Egyptian effendiyyah was defined more by what she termed as their culture, or better yet – lifestyle, than by any other socio-economic category. Once a term of formal address to any Ottoman dignitary, including the sultan himself, by the mid-nineteenth century "effendi" became to designate the graduates of the new Khedival schools that Muhammad Ali (r. 1805-1848) and his successors established, schools that followed a European curriculum rather than a religious (Azhari) one; "effendi" also designated the Egyptian students that Egypt's rulers sent on missions to be educated in Europe (mainly, but not exclusively, in France). Drawn mainly from the Arabic-speaking rural nobility, as opposed to the Ottoman-Circassian ruling elite, those graduates were employed in the expanding army and state bureaucracy, and were put in charge of executing their modernization projects. Thus, the effendis became identified with the *muwaẓafūn*, the state employees. A bureaucratic, or army, career was a vehicle for social mobility, and some Arabic-speaking effendis even broke a proverbial glass ceiling by securing the titles of Beys and Pashas.[195]

As British colonial control expanded in the 1890s by putting more and more British, and other European, nationals in the top echelons of the Egyptian administration

---

[195] They employed different strategies: some effendis married into the Ottoman-Circassian ruling elite, some had meteoric careers in the civil service, and some officers in the army had to stage a revolt (the ʿUrābī Revolt, 1879-1882, was partly aimed against the Ottoman-Circassian monopoly of the top ranks in the army, as much as it was aimed against British and French imperialist intervention).

and army, as well as paying them more than their Egyptian counterparts, it created a new glass ceiling that caused much resentment among the effendiyyah. It not only contributed to the galvanizing of the effendiyyah against British colonial rule, but also resulted in expanding its ranks to include members of the non-governmental, professional, sectors, especially lawyers, journalists, doctors, students, intellectuals, and political activists. Finally, by the mid-twentieth century, the effendiyyah came to encompass the educated but poor urban masses, and as a result, "effendi" could have been also understood as an insult rather than an honorary.[196]

This historical arc demonstrates the dynamism of the designation "effendi" over time, and hence, the difficulty of articulating a definition for it that would fix it to a certain unchanging social category. The effendiyyah might have originated with mid-level bureaucrats and officers, but it changed to include the professionals. Moreover, during much of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, those with a Western-style education, and those with an Azhari education, shared much of the same resentment against British colonialism, as well as the same political and social difficulties: their close cooperation during the 1919 Revolution (see chapter 4), for example, was the backbone of the mass protests. But at other times, they fought over access to employment, over social capital, or over inclusion in the effendiyyah.[197]

There is also a difficulty in identifying the effendiyyah with the socio-economic middle-class, especially because of the meanings that this term conjures from Western

---

[196] Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*; Idem., "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendiya': Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," in Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy Johnson, Barak Salmoni (eds.), *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 124-64.
[197] Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*; Ryzova, "Egyptianizing Modernity."

historiography. Many effendis were not necessarily much richer than the rural middle stratum, or the urban lower class, while some were clearly advancing into the socio-economic elite. Moreover, a career in the civil service, the army, or the professions was not the only route to upward mobility: by the 1890s, acquiring enough land, for example, also had the potential of gaining someone a title of Bey or Pasha. However, a purely culturalist definition would be a mistake as well, since economic resources were important: the poorer effendi had just enough additional income to be able to pay for the lifestyle that distinguished him from the urban poor, and it cost him dearly. A common critique against effendis in newspapers and journals of the time argued that they spent all their money on alcohol, clothes, coffeehouses, and dancing halls.[198]

The effendis, therefore, can be best understood as a social group inside the urban middle class, that identified with an urban, modern, lifestyle. Urbanity was a prerequisite, and many an effendi biography revolved around the physical, and socio-cultural, journey from ruralness to urbanity.[199] As Keith Watenpaugh aptly captured it, modernity to this social group meant the incorporation

> "into their daily lives and politics a collection of manners, mores, and tastes, and a corpus of ideas about the individual, gender, rationality, and authority actively derived from what they believed to be the cultural, social, and ideological praxis of the contemporary metropolitan Western middle classes. By *being modern*, members of this class distinguished themselves from the region's ruling Sunni Muslim oligarchy and subaltern class of urban and rural poor and evidenced how they conceived of themselves as a separate element of their society. Moreover, excluded by customary practices and political theory from structures of power, this class contested its exclusion and asserted its right to equality, citizenship, and political participation in the idiom of modernity… The dedication to these ideas, praxis, and politics marks that middle class as both a distinct

---

[198] Prestel, *Emotional Cities*, 130-4.
[199] Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, 139-78.

component and an unprecedented innovation in the social and cultural history of the Middle East, as well as a vital subject in the question of modernity in the non-West."[200]

As modern lifestyle, then, became the defining element in their socially negotiated collective identity, the effendi social identity hinged on its outward performance. Being an effendi meant first and foremost wearing the tarbush, and most usually, also a European suit to go with it. It meant consumerism, leisure, using the newest technologies, reading newspapers and magazines, and being educated in a Western curriculum. More often than not, being an effendi meant believing in rationality, and in companionate marriage out of love, choice, and pre-marital acquaintance. It meant championing Egyptian nationalism, and a representative and accountable government. Since performance of these styles, manners, and ideas was so crucial to the creation of the effendi social group, effendis needed an actual space – not (just) a virtual one such as print media, or film, as many researchers argue – in which to perform that social identity. That space could have been one's home, workplace, a club (if an effendi could afford one), urban promenades, squares, and shops: but all those places were also of a limited nature. Thus, the coffeehouse became so crucial a space for the creation and social reproduction of the effendiyyah: not only as a place to perform one's belonging to that social group, to see and be seen, but also as a place to network, socialize, and galvanize that social group. Cairo's coffeehouses became the crucible of its effendiyyah.

---

[200] Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, 8.

Locating the effendiyyah in the coffeehouses of Cairo's new, European, neighborhoods, such as ʾAzbakiyyah, ʾIsmāʿīliyyah, or Bāb al-Lūq, is easily done from countless references, in tourist guides, in Shīmī Bey's reports that listed the names and hangouts of army officers and civilian officials with the title Bey or Effendi, in representations in popular culture, in print media, or in photographs.[201] Effendis met in those coffeehouses regularly, either with their friends, or with new acquaintances: one interviewee from a very well-to-do family, who remembered Cairo in the 1940s, recalled how her father met his friends in fine coffeehouses (called "casino") every evening after work, and played trick-track (a kind of dominos).[202] The secret reports of Khedival spy, Agent 294, detailed how effendis used to introduce themselves to one another in various coffeehouses around Cairo, sometimes just after overhearing the other's conversation.[203] Both the regularity, and the networking opportunity, made coffeehouses crucial for creating, maintaining, and reproducing the social bonds that formed the effendiyyah.

It was in those regular meetings in coffeehouses that effendis dressed their part and played their part by having conversations on topics ranging from the personal to current politics (see chapter 3), by reading and discussing the newspapers, by drinking and eating European food and drinks (especially alcohol), and sometimes by playing board or card games, listening to music, or

---

[201] For British tourist guides, and Shīmī Bey's reports, see above. For an example of effendi representation in popular culture, see the opening scene of "*Fahemuh*": ʾIsmāʿīl, *Masraḥ ʿAlī al-Kassār*, vol. 1, 163-7. On the critique of effendi lifestyle in the print media, see: Prestel, *Emotional Cities*, 107-35

[202] Interview with Levana Zamir, Tel Aviv, November 8, 2015.

[203] See, for example, the following reports by Agent 294: HIL 28/76-8, March 15, 1901; HIL 28/83, March 25, 1901; HIL 28/95-6, November 12, 1901; HIL 28/134, January 19, 1902. And see chapter 3.

watching a show. These habits, the habits of being and effendi, defined that group so distinctly, that they became what would-be effendis aspired to. In his memoires, writer Abdallah al-Ṭūkhī (1926-2001), recalled how as a schoolboy in his native village, he aspired to be part of the effendi coffeehouse culture when he grew up: "When will I grow bigger and enter those restaurants and sit in those cafes, drink coffee, have my shoes polished while reading the papers like those men?"[204]

---

[204] Abdallah al-Ṭūkhī, ʿAynān ʿala al-Ṭarīq [Eyes on the Road] (Cairo: GEBO, 2002), 111, as quoted and translated in Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, 162.

Figure 23. Performing effendiyyah: Young men, probably adolescents, wearing a tarbush, emblematic of the effendiyyah, with a garb, denoting a rural origin, or a low-class urban one, sitting outdoor in a small, but European-style, or European-influenced, coffeehouse, having their shoes shined. Cairo, the 1910s.

Shoe-black of Cairo. Cairo Egypt [Between 1910 and 1920] Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/92514669/. (Accessed February 06, 2018.)

The Qahāwī Baladiyyah *and Social Distinction*

Of course, the older, Egyptian-Ottoman coffeehouses, persisted. As discussed above, they

adopted and modified many of the styles of the Mediterranean-cum-European

coffeehouses. First and foremost, they changed their furnishing and internal design by

replacing the stone or wooden *maṣṭabah*-s with small tables and chairs, filling their

spaces with them. They also started serving tea, and sugaring their coffee, while some

also served small dishes.[205] For many of their poor, working class, customers, large

quantities of strong tea and coffee, as well as *būẓah* in the nearby taverns, continued to be

a staple that both suppressed hunger, provided some nourishment, and served as

stimulants.[206] Water-pipes and card or board games continued to be a staple in those

coffeehouses, but other forms of entertainment changed: the story-tellers and dancers

ceded the place to the gramophone, and later to the radio, during the first half of the

twentieth century.

The clients, and owners, of those coffeehouses continued to come from Cairo's

working and poorest classes. Since the 1880s, as the city expanded, and was connected to

the countryside by the railways, great numbers of poor immigrants from that countryside

came to Cairo in search of economic opportunities, settling in its old quarters, and in new

slums to its north and south. As Hanan Hammad showed in her study on the workers of

al-Maḥallah al-Kubra, such coffeehouses and *būẓah* taverns were essential for the

---

[205] Although they started sugaring their coffee, the *qahāwī baladiyyah* continued to serve sweetened drinks, like sherbet, alongside their coffee. In festive occasions, such as Ramadan, these sherbets were colored in red and similar bright colors. Interview with Yosef Dabi, Tel Aviv, November 2, 2015. Dabi was born and raised in Cairo in the 1930s and 1940s.

[206] On the strong "black tea," in which tea leaves were mixed with hemp, tobacco, and other supposedly stimulant herbs, and was popular with villagers in the countryside, and possibly with urban workers as well, see: Thomas Russell Pasha, *Egyptian Service: 1902-1946* (London: John Murray, 1949), 40-1.

socialization and acclimation of migrant workers to their new urban environment. Since cohesive groups of workers – categorized by workplace or place of origin – regularly patronized certain coffeehouses, these became a go-to address for out-of-town visitors who were looking for someone, for rivals, or for newcomers looking for support. Those coffeehouses became crucially important hubs of information about the city, as well as for news from back home. They provided workers with the space to socialize, comfort, and support one another, whether in their intimate lives, or in fighting for their working conditions. Workers used to gather in the *qahāwī baladiyyah* and talk about happy occasions, as well as problems, in their family life, and even in their sexual lives. They talked about the news, or about problems with living in the city (such as commuting). It was in coffeehouses and taverns that workers drafted and signed petitions to the government or the Palace about their working and living conditions.[207]

As before (see chapter 1), the *qahāwī baladiyyah* provided a space for workers to compete in, and perform, their hypermasculinity, ranging from macho physical tests of strength, to demonstrating an ability to attract women's attention. Such competitions, accompanied by bravado, obscene language, and exposure of private sexual lives, often led to physical violence in coffeehouses. The changes to gender segregation in public spaces brought by the Mediterranean/European style coffeehouses also influenced the *qahāwī baladiyyah*: by the 1940s, some of them, especially poor coffeehouses of non-Muslim Egyptians and foreigners, also served families, including women. Some coffeehouses were poor cabarets or brothels, inspired by the *cafés-dansants*, where

---

[207] Hanan Hammad, *Industrial Sexuality: Gender, Urbanization, and Social Transformation in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 55, 73, 75-6. Interview with Yosef Dabi, Tel Aviv, November 2, 2015.

women served as the entertainment. Even in all-male coffeehouses, the men inside the coffeehouse continued to interact with the women around it. Novelist Naguib Mahfouz described at length in *Midaq Alley* how Ibrahim Faraj the pimp seduced the young and beautiful Ḥamīdah by looking at her window from his place at a table outside the coffeehouse which was the beating heart of the little alley, one that Ḥamīdah could watch from her window. It is worth noting that Faraj ran a high-end, European-style, brothel in the new neighborhoods, and came to the small and poor alley in the old parts of Cairo specially to recruit poor Ḥamīdah.[208]

It was probably also around that time that such coffeehouses began to be called *qahwah baladiyyah*, referring to the symbolic character of *Ibn al-Balad*, literally: Son of this Local, which has emerged in contradistinction to the effendi, to elite men (*Awlād al-Dhawāt*), and to foreigners (*Khawājah*). Much like these terms, *Ibn al-Balad* could designate a number of different characters depending on place, time, and social situation, but from the late nineteenth century onward, it was mostly used to refer to the Egyptian, mostly Muslim, working class "masses" (called by educated writers ʿāmmah), living in the poor neighborhoods of Cairo. By extension, *Baladī* was an adjective that described anything, like coffeehouses, that was associated with *Awlād al-Balad*.[209]

---

[208] Hammad, *Industrial* Sexuality, 73, 75-6. Interview with Yosef Dabi, Tel Aviv, November 2, 2015. Mahfouz, *Zuqāq al-Midaq*.

[209] Sawsan El-Messiri, *Ibn al-Balad: A Concept of Egyptian Identity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 1-30.

Figure 24. "[*Qahāwī Baladiyyah*, turn of the twentieth century]", Colorized Photographic Postcards, Max Karkegi Collection, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Boîte VZ-1246 (10).

As effendi, *khawājah*, and *ibn al-balad* were discursively constructed in opposition to one another, so were their coffeehouses. However, keeping the distinction between their coffeehouses and others was important especially for the effendis. Several Jewish interviewees from bourgeois families, who remember Cairo in the 1940s,

reiterated that their coffeehouse milieu consisted of Jews, Muslims, and Christians intermingling with ease, but that none of them would have set foot in a *qahwah baladiyyah*. [210] One interviewee speculated that her parents would have never agreed to her marrying a coffeehouse owner.[211] Apparently, class distinction trumped any other kind of social categorization. Such were the social boundaries that they shaped and constricted the social behavior of even would-be effendis: one interviewee came from a low-income family, his father being a sandwich seller on the streets of Cairo. Nevertheless, he attended a French school, probably on a scholarship. Consequently, he did not use to go to coffeehouses at all: he could not afford the more expensive ones, the ones he wanted to go to as a French school student, but he would not go to a *qahwah baladiyyah*, as he did not want to be associated with that kind of crowd, the one that he belonged to socio-economically, but not socio-culturally.[212] This kind of class-performance by avoidance is a prime example for how strongly effendis, even young aspiring effendis, felt about keeping the social distinction between their coffeehouses and the *qahāwī baladiyyah*, a distinction that was crucial for the socio-cultural reproduction of their group. This story also shows that those social boundaries hinged on both symbolic cultural capital, as well as economic ability, rather than only on the former over the latter, as Ryzova argued.

---

[210] There were a few coffeehouses owned by Jews in Cairo, especially in areas where Jews were concentrated, such as the poor neighborhoods of *Ḥārat al-Yahūd, al-Ẓāhir, or Sakākīnī*. But with the possible exception of the coffeehouse/bar *Victoria* in *al-Ẓāhir*, they were not especially identified as "Jewish coffeehouses," serving an exclusive Jewish clientele. Maurice Uzon, "Memories from the Nile Country," [in Hebrew] *Bney Hayeor: A Journal for the Heritage of Egyptian Jewry*, 2 (2006), 13-4. Interview with Maurice Uzon, Tel Aviv, November 15, 2015. Interview with Felix Cohen, Tel Aviv, December 10, 2015. Interview with Yosef Dabi, Tel Aviv, November 2, 2015.

[211] Interview with Levan Zamir, Tel Aviv, November 8, 2015. Zamir is a Cairo native from a high-bourgeois background.

[212] Interview with Shimʿon Tamir, Tel Aviv, November 15, 2015.

It would be wrong, however, to simply equate Mediterranean/European style coffeehouses only with the Egyptian middle and higher classes, or only with the effendiyyah. For one thing, many of the Mediterranean immigrants to Egypt were working class themselves, and many of the coffeehouses they opened were very modest – they served both the immigrant and non-immigrant workers. Moreover, the older, Egyptian-Ottoman style coffeehouses that served Cairo's lower classes, adopted many Mediterranean/European styles. This actually created a smoother congruity between the old and new Cairo, in a way that disturbs the sharp contrast proposed by the "dual city" model. More importantly, it disturbs the neat dichotomy between "Eastern" and "Western" coffeehouses that was so important to Bishārah Taqla and his effendi readers. Although the effendis had a vested interest to paint their European-style coffeehouses as socially superior to the *qahāwī baladiyyah*, at the end of the day, the new coffeehouses did not replace or suppress the latter. As we saw in chapter 1, the *qahāwī baladiyyah* have always served the lower classes, and they remained vibrant – and adaptable – throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Those were the Mediterranean/European coffeehouses that were new to the scene, and they attracted new social groups into it, whether older elites, or new middle-class ones, like the effendiyyah, which was in the process of creating itself, by using, among other strategies, the space of the new coffeehouses.

Conclusion

Within a couple of decades after building expansive new neighborhoods west of mid-nineteenth century Cairo, the number of new coffeehouses there surpassed that of coffeehouses in the now older parts of town. The architecture of both the new neighborhoods and the new coffeehouses was Italian or French, and the latter's internal design and furnishing took after the coffeehouses on the European side of the Mediterranean. They introduced new ways of drinking coffee (sweetened, with milk), as well as other hot beverages (tea, chocolate), and they served food (mostly cakes and pastries). Many were opened by Greek and Italian immigrants, and catered to a fast growing community of mostly-Mediterranean immigrants in Cairo – as well as to non-immigrant Egyptians.

Eagerly and equally enjoying them were a multitude of well-off – though not particularly rich – Egyptians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, who were civil servants, state employees, and professionals. They moved out from the old neighborhoods to the new administrative, commercial, and entertainment hubs of the new ones, where most of the new coffeehouses were established. This new social group in the urban middle class, the effendiyyah, was in the process of forming its collective identity by adopting what it construed as "(all-)European" middle-class worldview, intellectual attitudes, cultural styles, social manners, and consumption practices. They therefore needed the new coffeehouses as a space to publicly perform those social and cultural habits, to perform their collective identity.

The labeling of the new coffeehouses as "European," then, was a social construction formulated by immigrant-residents as well as by the Egyptian effendiyyah. While "European" actually meant Mediterranean, thus deepening the integration of Cairo and Egypt into a Mediterranean cultural world, it was used by the two intermingled social groups for a variety of purposes. Recent immigrants were interested in recreating the familiar and comforting socio-cultural settings of their countries of origin; they were also keen on profiting from the business opportunities that their coffeehouses offered; and as a space for social performance, coffeehouses allowed them to exhibit their privileged social status as outside the reach of Egyptian law and taxes. For effendis, performing their collective identity in the new coffeehouses set them apart from the social classes who patronized the old coffeehouses. These coffeehouses now became the *qahāwī baladiyyah*, suggesting some measure of local authenticity in view of foreign influence. But influenced they were: the *qahāwī baladiyyah* adapted and modified many of the designs, foodways, and entertainment brought over by the new coffeehouses. At the same time, they continued to serve an influx of immigrants from rural Egypt, who, to a large extent, settled where the effendis had just left. The *qahāwī baladiyyah* remained vibrant and adaptable, fulfilling crucially important social functions for the Cairene working and poor classes, as they always did. It is not that the effendis, or the *khawājah*-s, and their coffeehouses pushed the Ottoman coffeehouses down the symbolic social hierarchy: Egyptian-Ottoman coffeehouses were always associated with lower-class sociability. Inasmuch as the new coffeehouses indeed were more expensive, or served a more affluent clientele, and many did not, those new coffeehouses opened up an urban space for a new kind of social group to use coffeehouses in order to network, socialize, and

form their social identity (and as will be discussed in chapter 3, also to politically galvanize).

Looking, then, at the social and urban history of Cairo from the prism of its old and new coffeehouses challenges the "dual city" model that sharply contrasted the two parts of Cairo. Its coffeehouse scene shows an extreme urban and social dynamism, that nevertheless created some congruity: new forms rapidly entered the cityscape – facilitated by European imperial intervention but not necessarily operating under colonial logic – while old forms quickly adopted and modified some of their styles, and stayed strong and vital as ever. This urban congruity existed despite the efforts and interests of the Egyptian effendiyyah and some Mediterranean immigrants to emphasize the contrast and distinction between the two kinds of coffeehouses. Their efforts had less to do with ethnicity or citizenship, and more to do with social class, and social distinction, predicated on some economic ability.

It should be emphasized, however, that not every socio-cultural importation from "Europe," whatever that meant to Egyptians at that time, was automatically accepted as superior practice that needed to be emulated, or as positively marking its adherents. In particular, alcohol consumption, and mix gender socializing in public, which the new Mediterranean/European coffeehouses helped reintroduce, were heavily criticized by many in the Egyptian middle class and elites, and were not practiced in the *qahāwī baladiyyah*. Many middle class men took part in drinking alcohol, socializing with women and young males, or consuming prostitution in the new coffeehouses and similar institutions, while elite men did the same in their homes, secret apartments, or exclusive clubs. However, many others of the same milieus denounced those new practices of

leisure and entertainment as socially and morally corrupting, facilitating foreigners' schemes of economic and political exploitation, or a problem of state control and governmentability. It is not surprising, then, that Mediterranean/European coffeehouses were implicated in anti-colonial critique during the 1900s and 1910s, as will be discussed in chapter 3, and perhaps in a twist of self-irony, by the same effendis who used them. As for alcohol consumption and the presence of women in coffeehouses – usually being connected by critics – these practices were precariously normalized in some coffeehouses towards the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter 3:

Cairo's Coffeehouses and the Public Sphere at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Introduction

The role that coffeehouses played in politics has been a popular topic for scholarly research. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas' pioneering work on the rise (and eventual demise) of bourgeois public sphere and civil society as part of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment drew attention to the part of English coffeehouses in those developments, and subsequently inspired a slew of more focused scholarship.[213] Habermas' key observations laid the basis for this discussion: coffeehouses were one of few crucial places where men gathered to debate issues of common interest, first literature, or philosophy, and eventually also politics. Thus, they formed "public opinion," which eventually came to bear down on the policies and actions of political authorities, and even restrict them. Historians of eighteenth-century English coffeehouses also pointed out the crucial role that they had as hubs for news and information,

---

[213] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991). An influential historical study focused on English coffeehouses is: Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).

especially through the distribution of newspapers and pamphlets. For Habermas, equal access to the public sphere (which meant, for example, that everyone could get in to the coffeehouse), and equal participation in its debates, regardless of social station, were key to the formation and success of the public sphere. However, scholars have since debunked this inclusiveness, or "democratizing," theory, pointing out to the many social groups and classes that were excluded from those particular public places, especially women.[214] Other scholars challenged the dichotomy between "private" and "public" spheres, or Habermas' conclusions about the nature of the relationship between "state" and "society." In this particular regard, some historians, following his notion that public opinion and the authorities, or "the state," were antagonistic to each other, also pointed out to the ensuing interest of authorities in surveilling and curtailing this public exchange of news and ideas, which resulted in sending spies and informers to coffeehouses, as well as policing them.[215]

Studies on coffeehouses in the Ottoman world echo these themes. As a public place for men to gather and socialize, coffeehouses hosted conversations that from very early on have dealt with political news, intellectual or literary issues, and personal matters. This, in turn, prompted the suspicions and anxieties of authorities, as well as their attempts to curtail such activities. It is, in fact, very difficult to disentangle the

---

[214] The scholarship that Habermas has inspired, and the scholarship about his ideas, are too vast to even begin adumbrating. A well-regarded starting point, that includes some of the major critiques mentioned above, is: Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge. Mass.: MIT Press, 1992). For a consideration of Habermas' ideas about the public sphere in a Middle Eastern and North African context, see: Seteney Shami (ed.), *Publics, Politics and Participation: Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2009).
[215] For a consideration of Habermas' dichotomy between "public" and "private" in an Ottoman context, see for example: Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire." About surveillance of English coffeehouses in the seventeenth century, see: Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, 193-225. About surveillance of Istanbul coffeehouses in the nineteenth century, see: Kırlı, "The Struggle over Space".

actions that took place in coffeehouses from the reactions of authorities to them in the historical record, as the information is usually related by sources close to the authorities' point of view. Hattox, for example, discussed an incidence occurring as early as 1511 in Mecca, probably only a couple of decades after coffee was introduced to the city from the Yemen, where Meccan local authorities (still Mamluk at that time) became suspicious of the drink and the gatherings of men who drank it, and prohibited it.[216] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a few Ottoman sultans have repeatedly ordered the closing down of the – already hundreds of – coffeehouses in Istanbul, because of rampant conversation about affairs of state.[217] Ottoman chronicler Mustafa Naima, discussing such an order by Sultan Murād IV (r. 1623-40) given in 1633, had this to say about coffeehouses:

> "At that time coffee and tobacco were neither more nor less than a pretext for assembling; a crowd of good-for-nothings was forever meeting in coffee-houses or barber shops or in the houses of certain men – houses which were places on the order of club-houses – where they would spend their time criticizing and disparaging the great and the authorities, waste their breath discussing imperial interests connected with affairs of state, dismissals and appointments, falling outs and reconciliations."[218]

---

[216] Hattox, 30-38.

[217] Cengiz Kırlı, "The Struggle over Space"; Selma Özkoçak, "Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History*, 33 (2007), 965-86; Gwendolyn Collaco, "The Ottoman Coffeehouse: All the Charms and Dangers of Commonality in the 16th-17th Centuries," *Lights: The MESSA Quarterly*, 1/1 (Fall, 2011), 61-71.

[218] Lewis V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima*, ed. Norman Itzkowitz (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 94-6.

Moreover, Istanbul's coffeehouses were not all talk. Many coffeehouses there were owned by Janissary regiments, whose members constituted by the eighteenth century one of the most politically volatile elements of the capital and the empire. Janissaries, who had once been members of an elite infantry corps, but whose ranks by the eighteenth century had fallen on hard times, used coffeehouses as their regimental headquarters, sometimes even as police stations, and other times used them as the places where they lived, launched extortive activities, talked politics, and planned uprisings.[219]

Ultimately, as historian Cengiz Kırlı argued, Istanbul's coffeehouses created a kind of public sphere that was "an arena of political struggle between the state and the populace over controlling the space of political discourse."[220] And it seems that this was a feature of Ottoman coffeehouses very early on, or at least, it did not take a prolonged process to develop, as Habermas and others have suggested for European coffeehouses. As Kırlı showed, Ottoman authorities have changed their attitude for dealing with Istanbul's coffeehouses, from wholesale closing and sheer violence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to exemplary punishment in the eighteenth century, to mass surveillance and control in the nineteenth century.[221]

A brief note on what I mean by "political" or "politics" might be in order here, as these terms are sometimes used in a totalizing, all-encompassing, manner, which renders them meaningless. Not ignoring the firm connections and relationships between politics

---

[219] Ali Çaksu, "Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul" in Dana Sajdi, ed., *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2007), 117-32; Kırlı, "The Struggle over Space", 112-35. See also: Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
[220] Kırlı, "The Struggle over Space", 17.
[221] Kırlı, "The Struggle over Space", 20, 245-86.

and other categories of intellectual, social, economic, or cultural action, in the context of Cairo's coffeehouses, I use "political" and "politics" as *descriptive* terms for certain topics of conversation and types of action, respectively. Naima's seventeenth century list of these topics still held true: discussing rulers, their delegates and underlings, or the state bureaucracy, both civil and military; discussing government dismissals and appointments, falling outs and reconciliations; discussing government interests and policies, as well as certain events, domestic or foreign, that concerned the governing of Egypt; or the procurement and advancement of personal interests with the government.

In this chapter, I will discuss how Cairo's coffeehouses functioned in, or as, the public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, mainly through the eyes of an informer to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II, agent number 294. The discussion will start, however, in the late 1870s, and the role of ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses in the *Urabi Revolution*, especially the role of one particular coffeehouse, Coffeehouse Matatia, in shaping the ideological setting for that political event. This role put Coffeehouse Matatia on a par with such places as Masonic lodges and exclusive clubhouses, themselves a relatively recent kind of places, which were pivotal for the formation of elite political discourse in Egypt at that time. After a detailed look into the identity and work of Agent 294, within the historical context of Egyptian state surveillance, I will use his reports to examine the nature of coffeehouses as spaces for political talk, including the kinds of issues that captured their patrons' interests, and the role of journalists and newspapers in facilitating political debates there. I will use his reports to roughly map coffeehouses across Cairo according to the nature of their engagement with politics, and more importantly, map them across the social hierarchy, and in connection to other places in the public sphere

where politics were discussed. Finally, I will also explore the physical absence of women from coffeehouses and their kind of political discussion, at a time when elite women found new avenues for political and social activism, which in its turn, did generate debates about "the woman question" among men in coffeehouses. To conclude, I will consider the role of Cairo's coffeehouses as part of a wide network of places that made up the public sphere, and how the social habit of engaging with politics in that space could galvanize political awareness. In the next chapter, I will explore how this social reality incorporated Cairo's coffeehouses into political action during times of nationalist tumult.

Coffeehouse Matatia, Exclusive Clubs, Masonic Lodges, and the *Urabi Revolution*

Writing about coffeehouses in Ottoman Egypt, historian Michel Tuchscherer pointed out that they were a place where news and information circulated, but that "chronicles and archival documents are silent in regard to any political role that the Egyptian coffeehouses of that time could have played."[222] Indeed, we should not simply assume that what was true for Istanbul was also true for Cairo, and in exactly the same way – the very fact that Cairo's coffeehouses were largely a lower-class phenomenon, in contradistinction to the situation in Istanbul, proves that point. But that just might be a reason for them not to show up in political chronicles. Moreover, the presence of low-rank Ottoman soldiers in Cairo's coffeehouses, when elements of the Mamluk vanquished regime were still around, is another reason to believe in the potential of

---

[222] Tuchscherer, "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane," 110.

coffeehouses to have had a political role. By the 1830s, just as in Istanbul, Lane noted that secret police agents were roaming the streets of Cairo, where they "often visit the coffee-shops, and observe the conduct, and listen to the conversation, of the citizens."[223] We may therefore assume that by the end of the nineteenth century, Cairo's coffeehouses have already had a history, perhaps centuries worth, of forming an urban space for political debate and action, which might have checked or challenged political power, and for that reason was surveilled and controlled by that power.

Nowhere did it manifest itself more than in Coffeehouse Matatia (Matātyā). Naḥman Matātyā (Mattatias) was a Jewish merchant from northern Greece who was drawn, like many others, to Egypt's economic boom of the late 1860s and early 1870s. In 1872 he bought the land which was previously occupied by Khedive Ismail's circus, near ʿAtabah Square, in the ʾAzbakiyyah area, and commissioned French architect Ambroise Baudry to design an imposing French-style building. The Matatia Building was opened in 1875-6, and on its ground floor was a handsome coffeehouse, which was known as Coffeehouse Matatia, after the building, or alternatively as Café de la Poste (al-Būstah), for its proximity to Cairo's new post office building.[224] Coffeehouse Matatia was regularly frequented by Islamic ideologist and political activist, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-1897), and his circle, including Islamic reformer and later Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905), the nationalist editor, poet, and speaker, ʿAbdallah al-Nadīm (1845-1896), Colonel Ahmad ʿUrābī (1841-1911), army officer, cabinet minister, and later prime minister, Mahmud Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1839-1904), and judge, minister, and

---

[223] Lane, *Manners and Customs*, vol. 1, 163.
[224] Marie-Laure Crosnier Leconte and Mercedes Volait (eds.), *L'Égypte d'un architecte: Ambroise Baudry (1838-1906)*, (Paris: Somogy Éditions d'Art, 1998), 63.

later nationalist leader, Saʿd Zaghlūl (1859-1927), among others. Al-Afghānī used to preach his novel ideas about Islam and politics there to his followers and fans, turning Coffeehouse Matatia into an ideological recruiting ground. He reportedly delivered a fiery speech there, calling on Egyptians to resist and rise against their oppressors, right on the eve of the *Urabi Revolution*.[225]

It is important to note that al-Afghānī used to preach his ideology also in his own house, where he established an intellectual salon (majlis), and in masonic lodges, a couple of which he opened and headed himself. Many of his companions in Coffeehouse Matatia also followed his lectures in his majlis and in his masonic lodge, but al-Afghānī chose to propagate his views also in that coffeehouse in order to maximize his audience, since access to the two other places was naturally limited. This was an unusual move, since elite men, and certainly the most prominent political leaders in the country, did not usually socialize, or discuss politics, in coffeehouses, but indeed in their own homes, masonic lodges, exclusive clubhouses, and even the grand hotels, which were new venues in themselves.

Italian and French émigrés and political exiles had established masonic lodges in Cairo and Alexandria early in the nineteenth century, followed by British lodges in the

---

[225] ʿĪd Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Ḥikāyah Maqāhī al-Ṣafwah wal-Kharāfīsh* [The Story of the Coffeehouses of the Elites and the Good-for-Nothings], (Cairo: Wizārah al-Thaqāfah, Al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 2014), 23-34. The *Urabi Revolution* was a political intervention by army officers, buttressed by outbursts of popular protest in Cairo and Alexandria, between 1879 and 1882, led by Egyptian Colonel Ahmad ʿUrābī. Widely considered to be the first instance of modern Egyptian nationalism, its participants, acting on new ideologies, and enjoying popular support, revolted against British and French intervention, and forced the new Khedive, Tawfīq (r. 1879-92), to promulgate a constitution, and open an elected parliament. Its success prompted the British to occupy Egypt in 1882, and exile its leaders. See: Juan R. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East : Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). On al-Afghānī, see: Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī": A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

last quarter or so of that century. Egyptian notables entered them as early as the 1840s,

and in more significant numbers from the 1870s onwards. With various Khedives, such

as Khedive Tawfīq, and other members of the Khedival family, serving as patrons and

Grand Masters, masonic lodges were quite an elitist venue. European consuls and

diplomats, the grand Pashas and Beys, judges, lawyers, intellectuals, and doctors, Syrian

Christian merchants and Muslim bureaucrats, all mingled in those lodges. Indeed, if in

the 1870s their activity was somewhat secretive, then by the twentieth century it became

quite open, covered openly in the press. Membership was considered an exclusive status

symbol, even if by the twentieth century it was somewhat expanded from the aristocracy

to the effendiyyah. Class was the common denominator, with religious and other

affiliations being less important, turning masonic lodges into a meeting place for

Europeans and Egyptians. Historian Juan Cole discussed the influence that anti-

imperialist and constitutional-monarchist intellectuals, who were members of masonic

lodges, had on the *Urabi Revolution*; and with figures such as Saʿd Zaghlūl and

Muhammad Farīd as early masons and later nationalist leaders, masonic lodges have

undoubtedly had a continuous role to play as places where high politics were shaped,

well into the twentieth century.[226]

Private and exclusive clubhouses, either as sporting clubs or gentlemen clubs,

which were introduced to Egypt mainly by the British colonial administration and army

---

[226] For the beginnings of Freemasonry in Egypt, see: Jacob M. Landau, "Prolegomena to a Study of Secret Societies in Modern Egypt," *Middle East Studies* 1/2 (January 1965): 135-86. For a discussion on the role of Freemasonry and other secret societies in the *ʿUrābī Revolution*, see: Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 133-63. For a reproduction of an 1891 list of members of the *Grande Loge Nationale D'Egypte*, including Khedive Tawfīq and Saʿd Zaghlūl, and other details about Freemasonry in Egypt, see: Samir Raafat, "Freemasonry in Egypt: Is it still around?," *Insight Magazine* (March 1, 1999), http://www.egy.com/community/99-03-01.php (accessed: May 19, 2017).

in the late nineteenth century, played a similar role.[227] Local clubs soon followed, and they were as indiscriminately elitist and exclusive as the masonic lodges were. An unusual report from 1894 by Khedival agent, the police officer Shīmī Bey (see chapter 2), sheds some interesting light on the social and political environment of such clubs. For some time during 1894, Shīmī Bey was following up on information that he received about a new club (klūb) that Ahmad Balīgh Pasha, head of Cairo's court of appeals, had opened. According to Shīmī's information, the membership was comprised mostly of judges, most of whom were Copts. It occupied a space in the old building of the Public Debt Commission (Caisse de la Dette Publique), in ʾAzbakiyyah. The club did not allow outsiders in its meetings, but Shīmī Bey has learned that political issues were discussed there.[228] He had some difficulty infiltrating the club, but on August 25, 1894 he had a breakthrough while visiting the courthouse, when he happened upon Muhammad Bey Majdī, a judge in the Indigenous (Ahlī) Court of Appeals, the son of "the late and famous ʿĀlim, al-Sayyid Bey Majdī." After a long conversation and a personal tour of the courthouse, during which Shīmī Bey ascertained Majdī's support for the Khedive, he broached the subject of the club with him:

> "I am hearing that Balīgh Pasha is managing a very nice club, which is restricted only to the men of the courts of law. This is something that would incite the jealous feelings of any free patriot [waṭanī ḥurr]: I, for example, am a policeman, of the judiciary police [ḍabṭiyyah qaḍāʾiyyah], so why people like me, for example, are not allowed in [the club]?"[229]

---

[227] The Khedival Sporting Club (now: the Gezira Sporting Club) was established in 1882 by the British army in the Cairene Nile island of Zamālik. Its archrival, the Muhammad Ali Club (now: the Egyptian Diplomatic Club), was opened in 1908 by then Prince and later King, Fuʾād, in Downtown Cairo.
[228] HIL 15/78, date missing.
[229] HIL 15/82-6, August 28, 1894.

Majdī denied this allegation, saying there were a few members in the club who were not

from the judiciary, and invited Shīmī Bey to accompany him to the club the following

evening, at 8pm. That evening he showed him around the halls of the club, including "the

place for the journals [jarānīl]." Shīmī was surprised that they were almost alone in the

club, except for Mustafa Pasha Ṣadīq and a friend of his, who went into the billiard room.

Majdī replied:

> "Anything that reached the East has been ruined. That is because of foreigners [al-Dakhīl]: we have with us Copts, and Shawwām, [in addition to] us Muslims. Whenever we meet, each group sits in a corner of the room, talking among itself. This is how the uniqueness of the gathering gets lost, as the purpose of the gathering is not just to drink coffee or alcohol, or read the journals, but to discuss whatever may benefit the Religion and the Nation [al-Dīn wal-Waṭan]. But how can we achieve this when our partners are [also] our rivals in Religion and Nationality?"[230]

Majdī continued in a long soliloquy, lamenting the loss of "old habits" and Islamic

"religion" in Egypt, as one can see "the Pasha, the Bey, the Effendi, the Shaykh, the

ʿUmdah [village headman], the ʿĀlim, and the sinner," all drinking wine with Christians

and Jews in the "popular places," as if the Quran allowed it. Thus, Majdī claimed, Egypt

has lost its Islamic distinction, but at the same time did not adopt Judaism or Christianity

either. By contrast, he stated, speaking from his own experience as a philosophy student

in Paris, other nations held fast to their religion. Majdī concluded by saying that the only

remedy to this situation was that the Khedive would endeavor day and night in order to

"revive what had died from the old habits, and spread the spirit of religion in the hearts of

his subjects."[231]

---

[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid.

This vivid perspective resists pegging down in any neat categories that might be obtained from reading only the rarified discussions in the press and the publications of the time. It comes from a high-ranking judge, a member of the social elite, a product of the reformed and "modernized" legal system, with a Paris education, but also from a family background of high-end Islamic scholasticism. The thrust of his discontent, judging from this sole report, was geared against the changes in public morals, framed in terms of losing Islamic public morals, and not necessarily against British imperialism or the Khedival political system. By identifying Egyptian nationalism with Islam – an identification that would not be obvious in the first decades of the twentieth century – judge Majdī was othering Copts and Shawwām, both Christians, as well as Jews, while still expressing an interest in engaging them for the greater good of Egypt. He still regarded Europe as a model for reform in Egypt.

For our purposes here, we should note the existence of such clubhouses in late nineteenth century Egypt: these places were replete with European (mainly British) elitist socio-cultural practices and spatial designs, such as a drawing room for reading the newspapers, a billiard room, and alcohol (alongside coffee). Moreover, there was an expectation that the gatherings in such clubhouses would engage in discussions about high politics. Another expectation, that these clubhouses (or masonic lodges, for that matter) would be a meeting place for different ethnic and religious groups, clearly did not pan out for judge Majdī in this particular case. This might be a reminder that sometimes, just sharing a space might not be enough. Nevertheless, it would be hasty to extrapolate from it a rule for all gatherings in clubhouses and lodges, especially as judge Majdī actually critiqued this state of affairs, meaning that he had indeed expected different

religious groups to come together in a discussion about the state of Egyptian society and nation. Be that as it may, it is also evident that such clubhouses (and lodges) remained quite elitist and exclusionary, as pointedly shown by Shīmī Bey's frustration that even "people like me" were not good enough to be allowed in.

This puts Coffeehouse Matatia in perspective: the caliber of people in al-Afghānī's circle who frequented that coffeehouse, its physical setup, its location in ʾAzbakiyyah, and al-Afghānī's alternate use of it, all strongly connect it to al-Afghānī's majlis and masonic lodges. The crucial difference was that Coffeehouse Matatia offered al-Afghānī the opportunity to appeal to a larger audience, which was excluded from the other two venues. How typical was the use of Coffeehouse Matatia for ideological preaching? Al-Afghānī's rivals in al-ʾAzhar lambasted his frequenting of that coffeehouse, and its location in ʾAzbakiyyah, associated as it was by that time with the sex industry, alcohol, and other "un-Islamic" social practices, did not help.[232] But what about other coffeehouses in Cairo?

Agent Number 294 and Egyptian State Surveillance

The reports produced by the state's surveillance machine about coffeehouses provide a unique perspective, and a wealth of detail, about the functioning of coffeehouses as a political public space. Historian of Egyptian police and secret services, Abd al-Wahāb Bakr, argued that although proper services exclusively concerned with "political

---

[232] Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Ḥikāyah Maqāhī*, 25; Muṣṭafa Fawzī bin ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Ghazāl, *Daʿwah Jamāl al-Dīn al-ʾAfghānī fī Mīzān al-ʾIslām* [Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī's Ideology in the Balance of Islam], (Riyad: Dār Ṭībah, 1983), 377-8.

security" (ʾamn siyāsī) were established only in 1910, similar tasks were already performed by the "regular" police and secret services a century earlier. He skillfully painted a historical arc in which the concept of "political security," as well as the tasks and targeted populations associated with it, have developed and expanded over time in response to the growing complexity of political challenges to Egypt's rulers. Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman governor who carved Egypt out from the Ottoman Empire for himself and his dynasty (r. 1805-48), entrusted his deputy with spying after the remaining Mamluks, whom he had to defeat in order to establish his rule. His successor, Abbas Ḥilmī I (r. 1849-1854), expanded his spies' scope, and entrusted Cairo's governor to spy after potential rivals from his own family, and important persons associated with them, as well as after the political inclinations of important families in Cairo. Khedive Ismail ordered the expansion and systematization of surveillance after political rivals from the Khedival family, after stories that circulated in Egypt, and after what the press was saying.[233]

Under Khedive Tawfīq, and before the British occupation, police chiefs were regularly reporting to the Interior Ministry and the cabinet about political activism in the foreign immigrant community, which was geared toward their home countries (especially Italy), about petitions and anonymous threat letters addressed to the Khedive and the government, and about activists in the ʿUrābī movement. Under British control after 1882, the Egyptian police continued to report about political activism within the foreign immigrant community, and especially about industrial actions, unionizing, and strikes by

---

[233] Abd al-Wahāb Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī: Madkhal li-Taʾrīkh al-ʾIdārah al-Maṣriyyah, 1805-1922* [The Egyptian Police: An Introduction to the History of the Egyptian Administration, 1805-1922], vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wal-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyyah, 2016), 8-34.

foreign workers, particularly in, but not limited to, the Suez Canal. In 1888 the British established a "secret police bureau" under the general command of the Egyptian police, which was dismantled in 1892. Its mission was to produce reports about the international political scene, as was relevant to Egypt, based on foreign press; monitor the attacks by the Sudanese Mahdi forces on the southern borders of Egypt, and their impact on the Egyptian communities there; monitor the political maneuvering of the deposed Khedive Ismail in Europe and Istanbul, based on press reports; and monitor the opinions of Egyptian elites toward the possibility of his return. Bakr argued that the mode of operation of this short-lived secret bureau, which gathered information, produced an analysis and made prognostications, was the first to introduce to the Egyptian secret services a modern mode of contending with political security.[234]

However, the reports that "Agent 294" wrote in 1901 and 1902 for Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II (r. 1892-1914) show that in parallel to the work of informers, analysts, and officers in the Egyptian police force, who were ultimately reporting to the Interior Ministry (Niẓārat al-Dākhiliyyah) and the cabinet, the Khedival Palace kept its own network of fixers and spies, as, apparently, did other senior politicians. There are about 200 pages of reports in file number 28 of the *Abbas Hilmi II Papers*, almost all of them are from that one informer, agent number "294." They are all framed as letters, addressed simply to "My Sire" (Mawlāyā), that is, directly to the Khedive. In one report, Agent 294 explicitly mentioned other "palace informers" (mukhbirīn al-maʿiyyah), warning the Khedive about some of them having double loyalties to other high-ranking people in the

---

[234] Ibid.

palace, or in politics.[235] It seemed to have been a highly professional and well-organized apparatus, as he was fastidious about signing his reports with his code number, "294." In one letter he even emphasized the importance of keeping that code system, and the names of agents, concealed, in wake of a security breach made by a novice.[236]

Agent 294's reports were all hand-written in a very formal standard Arabic (fuṣḥa),[237] and dated according to the Gregorian calendar.[238] Although, as noted, he was scrupulous about using only his code number, a couple of reports strongly suggest that his name was Muhammad Farīd al-Falakī ("the astronomer"), as they refer to him in the third person when reporting on conversations he actively participated in, although this is not entirely clear from the text.[239]

In one report he reminded the young Khedive of his long career:

"A Report Submitted to His Excellency the Khedive, May God Save Him

---

[235] HIL 28/130, date missing (probably from around May 1902).

[236] HIL 28/118, January 3, 1902. On the other hand, Agent 294 apparently knew the identity of other agents, as is apparent from his warning to the Khedive mentioned above, and from other reports, such as the one in which he reported about an attempt on his life, and on other informers' lives: HIL 28/51-2, date missing (probably from 1901).

[237] Most of the letters/reports were written by the same hand, although a few have different handwritings. This was probably due to the fact that Agent 294 was nearly blind (see below), and had to use a secretary, or a number of them, to read and write. One of them, Muhammad Labīb, even signed a couple of reports – in addition to 294's signature – as "the transcriber" (kātib al-ʾaḥruf), see for example: HIL 28/42, October 6, 1900. It is also possible, but there is no evidence for that in the reports, that they were transcribed by professional scribes working in the palace itself.

[238] The dates in my references indicate when the reports were signed, not when the events described in them occurred. In many cases, Agent 294 did provide dates for those events in the text, according to the Gregorian calendar, sometimes down to the hour of day, and I note that when appropriate. Usually, he wrote the reports a few days or so after the events, except for urgent cases. In some cases, the closing page of the reports with the date and signature is missing or scattered in the file, in which case I note the report as "date missing," although I try to give an approximate date when dates are available in the text itself.

[239] See: HIL 28/137-9, late February, 1902; HIL 28/140, February 28, 1902; HIL 28/171-2, March 5, 1902. See also the only instance in which the name "Farīd" appears near the signature "294": HIL 28/8, November 29, 1902. The practice of signing reports with a code number suggests that Shīmī Bey was the exception, probably because his position as a police officer in charge of informers, or "intelligence" in contemporary Western parlance, was overt and public knowledge.

I have already written about my service to the Noble Household from the times of the late Ismail Pasha [Khedive Ismail], and what I did in the lands of the Sudan during those years, where the late [Khedive], may God in His grace protect him, delegated me as a secret agent. I have travelled throughout those lands, as far as the borders of Abyssinia, for two whole years. Upon my return to Egypt, I wrote a report about the state of the Sudan at that time, and submitted it to my late benefactor. I transcribed another copy of it that was submitted to the late Muhammad Tawfīq Pasha [Khedive Tawfīq] when he was the Minister of the Interior. Among my [other] exploits was what I have done about the jeweler's shop, which was stolen whole, so I went to Europe and caught the stolen [goods] and the thieves together, and brought them back to Egypt. Also among my exploits in the times of your late father [Khedive Tawfiq] was my travel to Jirjā [Girga, a city in Upper Egypt], according to his orders, may God have mercy on him, where I exposed the Copts who slandered all the Muslims, and caught the falsified stamps that were falsely blamed on the Muslims. By doing that, I took the fraudsters, embarked on an English military boat, and returned to Cairo. I submitted the necessary and adequately detailed report about that. I was in a guise of a Coptic priest, as the mission dictated a change of attire etc. Also among my [achievements] was the service I rendered to your late father [Khedive Tawfīq] during the ʿUrābī Revolution. All of that is attested to in the secret records. Even when God has decreed for me an eye disease, [it was] due to my loyal love for the Noble Household, [that] whenever I heard something from anyone, whether I knew him or not, I started to pry on his affairs, those hated traitors to my benefactor, and reported him to my Liege. Sire, I do not seek a dirham or a dinar for my services, rather I seek from your Exalted Excellency [only] contentment with me, for if you are content, I am content."[240]

It appears then, that by the turn of the twentieth century, Agent 294 has served the Khedival family for about three decades, if not longer, as an informer and a fixer. In another report, he even mentioned his service as an informer to Khedive Ismail, directing his own network of informers, like Shīmī Bey.[241] It was only when his eyesight deteriorated due to illness that he started to report conversations he heard in the houses of the high and mighty, in gatherings of prominent religious leaders and functionaries

---

[240] HIL 28/7, date missing.
[241] HIL 28/130, date missing (probably from around May 1902).

(shaykhs),[242] and in coffeehouses and other public places that he used to frequent. From

his very detailed reporting, it emerges that Agent 294 was one of the shaykhs in Imam al-

Hussein Mosque in Old Cairo, one of the most important, influential, rich and large

mosque-complexes in Egypt, although his exact function there is not clear (with a great

number of functionaries in such a mosque-complex, his was probably not one of the

major positions there). Nevertheless, this position was enough to give him access to the

gatherings (majālis)[243] of prominent shaykhs, from al-ʾAzhar and other mosques, that

took place in their private residences, which Agent 294 routinely frequented. Thus, he

could report to the Khedive about those conversations that focused on the relationship

between Egypt's religious establishment and the palace, including frictions and alliances,

power struggles, and opinions on policies.[244]

In addition, Agent 294 made a living as a sought-after astrologer,[245] diviner,[246]

talisman maker,[247] and an exorcist-healer (for which he charged between one to five

---

[242] I use the term 'Shaykh' throughout for a leader of religious stature, and not 'ʿĀlim/ʿUlamāʾ', because that is the term the 294 used consistently. It denotes more of a social status than a level of erudition.

[243] I use the term 'majlis/majālis' throughout, although there are some firm justifications for translating it as 'salon/s.' Nevertheless, as both salon/s and majlis/majālis have very long and rich social and cultural histories in their respective cultures, European and Arab, it is worthwhile keeping this socio-cultural reference in an Arab-Egyptian context.

[244] See, for example: HIL 28/128, May 14, 1902; HIL 28/130-1, May 14, 1902; HIL 28/173, March 2, 1902. These reports will be discussed in detail below.

[245] See his report from April 1901, which recounted how he was recognized in Coffeehouse Islāmbūl by someone who offered, over a drink, to divulge the secrets of the famous (Jewish) astrologer from Izmir, Rabbi Baḥūr Levy, and his predictions about the political situation in Istanbul, in exchange for 294's secret knowledge. HIL 28/73, April 23, 1901.

[246] After ascertaining that Agent 294 knew geomancy (raml), Khalīl, Lord Cromer's Bāshyasqajī, or chief armed attendant, asked him whether Lord Cromer would stay in Egypt. The following day, Agent 294 returned with the answer that Lord Cromer would "stay in Egypt for 22 years, 5 months, 3 days, 2 hours, and 25 minutes. He would become loved by all Egyptians, from the rich to the poor. Many reforms in the country would be made by him, and he would take a lot of property from us. If the prime minister was inclined toward the Lord and said he loved him, then this is an inciting hypocrisy. He only loves him [Lord Cromer] so he can stay in his central position, or so the Lord helps him with all his income so he can rest at home." HIL 28/137-8, February 1902. Agent 294 was anti-Cromer, so this pro-Cromer, anti-Khedive, response was apparently a ruse to stave off possible suspicions that 294 was actually a spy for the Khedive.

Egyptian pounds per request or house visit, plus carriage fare).[248] The role of divination in Egyptian political culture is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study, but Agent 294's special profession meant that he had a wide and intimate access to the very elite of Egyptian political life, both Pashas and their wives. Just consider his report about visiting none other than ʿUrābī Pasha himself, at his house, and inside his "Ḥurum" (Harems), by his own invitation, a month or so after ʿUrābī returned to Egypt from exile.[249] More importantly, this access gave him knowledge about the Pashas' political aspirations and machinations, which they trusted him with. Thus, Agent 294 covered the gamut of the Egyptian social hierarchy and its involvement in politics, from elitist Pashas and Shaykhs, to the middle class and bohemian types, and to a lesser extent also the lower classes. He also covered much of the social scene that made up the Egyptian public sphere at the turn of the twentieth century, from the private mansions of the Pashas, to the majālis of the Shaykhs, to the gatherings in Cairo's coffeehouses, taverns, barbershops, and general stores.[250]

---

[247] In another report to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī from February 1902, Agent 294 informed him that Muḥarram Pasha Jāhīn had invited him to his home, where he hired him to prepare a talisman for him that he can carry on his body. This talisman was intended to make Muḥarram Pasha "liked" by the Ottoman Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd II, so that he would appoint him to the position of counselor (mushīr), thus forcing the Khedive to consult Muḥarram Pasha on every matter. HIL 28/174, February 13, 1902

[248] In a report from February 1902, he recounted in lengthy detail how he was hired, through a mutual friend, by Khalīl, Lord Cromer's Bāshyasqajī, or chief armed attendant, to heal his ailing wife, Katherine. At Khalīl's house, he successfully healed her by putting his hand on her forehead and reciting "the ancient words of God." HIL 28/137-8, February 1902.

[249] ʿUrābī was complaining that the Khedive has not received him yet. They also talked about al-Minshāwī (see below about the al-Minshāwī Affair). HIL 28/92, November 23, 1901.

[250] On barbershops and coffeehouses as popular places to gather around and discuss politics, see Agent 294's report from March 21, 1901, in which he informed the Khedive that one of the supporters of Abu al-Huda al-Ṣayyādī, a counselor to Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd on Arab affairs, has installed himself in a barbershop in the Imam al-Hussein [Mosque] neighborhood, and that the "adjacent coffeehouse" was a meeting place for journalists and readers of the pro-British newspaper al-Muqaṭṭam, one of the most influential newspapers of the time: HIL 28/89, March 21, 1901. On Abu al-Huda (d. 1909), see: Itzchak Weismann, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism," *Arabica* 54/4 (Oct., 2007): 586-92

How comprehensive or indicative was this snapshot of political talk in Cairo's public sphere in 1901-2? Just how much did it manage to capture? Two principal factors influenced the scope of this snapshot: access, and bias. Agent 294's access to different, and numerous, sites where conversations about politics were taking place was quite impressive. Of course, he did not have access to the whole gamut of the public sphere – most significantly, he did not have direct access to masonic lodges and exclusive clubhouses – and he did not have access to every site. Moreover, he naturally reported most about the places he had frequented the most: majālis of shaykhs from the al-Mahdī family, and coffeehouses in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, as well as in the newer ʿĀbdīn Palace area. Taken as a whole, however, this is indicative enough to draw a comprehensive, albeit never complete, map of actual sites in Cairo where public opinion was shaped, which might also explain why his reports were important enough to end up in the Khedive's private archive.

Agent 294's reporting was also shaped by his own biases, chief among them, the mission he was entrusted with by the Khedive and his bureaucracy. As he himself stated, that mission was to report on what people said, as he heard it in those sites he had access to, regarding the Khedive, especially (though not exclusively) when what was said was negative. In addition, he reported about intrigue and corruption that had any potential bearing on the palace. Consequently, Agent 294 focused on low-tier journalists who were critical of the Khedive, or pro-British; on newspapers with the same agendas, whether small and satirical, or big and influential; and on opinions about political figures, such as Muhammad ʿAbduh, or Prime Minister Mustafa Fahmī, whom he knew were at odds with the Khedive, and whom he considered to be pro-British. This very focused task

dictated and narrowed down Agent 294's reporting: it made him expand on issues that the Khedive and the palace were involved with, but only telegraph others, such as the public reaction to the two famous books by Qāsim Amīn on the status of women (see below).

Unsurprisingly, Agent 294's reports attributed a measure of agency and political weight to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī. But even reading against the grain of the inherent pro-Khedival bias in this source material, at the very least, Agent 294's reporting shows that for some Muslim middle-class circles, perhaps with a more conservative bend, that did not subscribe to the various reformist agendas, and no less important, for significant parts of public opinion, Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī was still associated with an anti-British position. Those Muslim middle-class circles, and lower-class public, still expected the Khedive to espouse anti-British policies, and use the reins of his power to advance them. This, at a particular point in time (1901-2) when conventional historiography usually describes him as less defiant toward the British, and his convoluted relationship with the nationalist anti-British movement as cooling off.

It is, therefore, hard to learn in detail about the full range of topics that occupied Egyptian public opinion from Agent 294's reports alone, but they are indicative of the kind of topics that were discussed, and more so, of the discussions that interested the state, and consequently, of the state's anxieties that might have affected its policies. Historian Alan Mikhail, writing about eighteenth and nineteenth century Ottoman – mainly Istanbul – coffeehouses, warned against eavesdropping on them through state surveillance documents and concluding that high politics was the only subject of

conversation there, and not, for example, people's daily lives and relationships.[251] This is surely true, to an extent, as a measure of balance and context. However, it also obscures the fact – underscored by surveillance reports such as Agent 294's – that coffeehouses, even small neighborhood ones such as Mikhail wrote about, did function as a primary go-to space for public debate and exchange of ideas on many topics, chief among them – politics. Furthermore, as we shall see in the next chapter, coffeehouses also became sites for political action, under specific historical circumstances.

Agent 294 and the Coffeehouses of ʿĀbdīn

The case of Coffeehouse Matatia illustrates the equivocal nature of ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses' involvement in politics. On the one hand, that particular coffeehouse played a pivotal role in shaping the ideological setting for the *Urabi Revolution*; and as we shall see in chapter 4, some of the coffeehouses in that area, which turned into veritable landmarks, like New Bar, or Café Chicha, also functioned as gathering places for nationalist activists during the 1910s. In the meantime, ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses served as a site for palace or elite intrigue. For example, in a letter to the Palace Police written by one, Abu al-ʿAyn Hussein, in January 1902, he informed the police that an effendi who worked at the palace approached him in Café Chicha, accusing him of writing a damaging report about him to the Khedive. In his letter, Hussein drew attention to breaches of confidentiality inside the palace, as well as to the palace employee who was talking about such sensitive matters in a public place such as a coffeehouse in

---

[251] Alan Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire," 159.

ʾAzbakiyyah.[252] On the other hand, ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses were, at best, elite playgrounds on the order of their exclusive clubhouses, and in that regard, they were unusual. At worst, they were part of a scene that was heavily criticized by moralists and purists for what they perceived as public debauchery.

But that was not the case for coffeehouses in the other neighborhoods of Cairo, according to the reports of Agent 294. After a day's worth of calling on a majlis of one shaykh or another, and making a house-call to one of the Pashas' mansions, Agent 294 enjoyed sitting around coffeehouses. He usually frequented the coffeehouses in the older parts of Cairo, especially one coffeehouse right across Bāb al-Faraj, one of Cairo's old gates, on the south-western edge of its old walls (the gate does not exist anymore). His other usual hangouts were the coffeehouses around the al-Hussein Mosque where he worked, and probably lived. But Agent 294 sometimes ventured out to the coffeehouses in ʿĀbdīn and ʾAzbakiyyah as well (see maps 3 and 5, in chapter 2).

In the coffeehouses surrounding the Khedival Palace at ʿĀbdīn, Agent 294 usually recorded conversations of men who were seeking someone at the palace that could intervene on their behalf and get them an honorific title (rutbah), or some other gain. In a report from March 1901, he detailed a conversation between two men in Coffeehouse al-ʾArman (the Armenian Coffeehouse) facing the ʿĀbdīn police station, who were waiting to catch Kamāl Pasha on his way out of the palace, as he had promised one of them to fix him with a title. On this, Agent 294 commented that "the likes of these [people] there are

---

[252] HIL 28/120, January 22, 1902.

many, who knock on the doors of notables for that same purpose."[253] The Head of the Khedival Council (Raʾīs al-Diwān al-Khidīwī), the Head of Protocol (Raʾīs al-Tashrīfāt), and the Khedive's Private Secretary (Kātim Asrār al-Khidīwī), were all mentioned by Agent 294 as the points of contact that usually came up in coffeehouse conversations for those purposes.[254]

Apparently, there were also people who made it their business to sit around ʿĀbdīn's coffeehouses and offer those who looked for access to the palace with their own contacts there. In a report from November 1901, Agent 294 wrote that while sitting in the coffeehouse of Yūsuf Abd Rabbuh "the barber" (al-Ḥallāq), in front of the royal palace, with the owner of the newspaper al-Mirṣād, who was prattling about a book that "no one in his right mind wants to read," he overheard a conversation between one Muhammad Jamīl and someone who had submitted a petition to the palace. Jamīl offered to arrange a meeting between that person and the Khedive's private secretary in the shop "al-Ḥātī" the next day. This Jamīl, Agent 294 commented, who was a son of one of the late Ḥalīm Pasha's Jawārī (courtesan, female-slave),[255] was renowned among Cairo's young notables (ʾAwlād Dhawāt Maṣr al-Wārithīn) as a first-class procurer, who used to hang around the ʾAzbakiyyah scene a lot, dine with Prince Aziz, and provide the Khedive's private secretary with fabricated information.[256]

---

[253] HIL 28/83, March 25, 1901

[254] HIL 28/76-8, March 15, 1901; HIL 28/95-6, November 12, 1901. See also a report about a conversation between two men in a barbershop in Cairo, that took place on January 16, 1902, at 9pm. The men were contemplating who to approach in the palace to help them with acquiring six feddans of land, and they settled on approaching Saʿīd al-Shīmī Bey: HIL 28/134, January 19, 1902

[255] This might refer to Muhammad Abd al-Ḥalīm Pasha (1831-94), Muhammad Ali's youngest son, and Ismail's rival for the Khedivate.

[256] HIL 28/95, November 12, 1901

Corruption of palace employees was another topic of coffeehouse conversations that Agent 294 recorded around ʿĀbdīn. In a report from April 1902, he noted a conversation between two men in a coffeehouse facing ʿĀbdīn Palace about the corruption of Mustafa Raḥmī, the overseer (nāẓir) of the palace kitchens, who was taking bribes from his employees so they could keep their jobs.[257] In another report from November that year, Agent 294 noted two separate occasions where he witnessed patrons of coffeehouses, one near his house in Cairo, and the other in Coffeehouse Louvre in Alexandria, who were sharing expensive wine and biscuits that were bootlegged from the palace's pantries.[258]

Agent 294 and the Coffeehouses of Old Cairo: Newspapers and Journalists

As noted above, Agent 294 mainly frequented those coffeehouses in the heart of Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo: those on its south-western edge,[259] and those around al-Hussein Mosque, both in today's Jamāliyyah district. Many of those coffeehouses were indeed *qahāwī baladiyyah* (see chapter 2), serving the working and poor classes. Some catered to the slightly better off effendiyyah, which by the turn of the twentieth century expanded its ranks to include professionals such as journalists, lawyers, students, and small bureaucrats, who could not afford the more expensive new neighborhoods. By far the fanciest and best known among the coffeehouses of that area was Coffeehouse al-Busfūr

---

[257] HIL 28/155-7, April 23, 1902

[258] HIL 28/8-9, November 29, 1902

[259] In particular, one coffeehouse at Bāb al-Faraj (The Gate of Deliverance), which does not exist anymore. In place of the medieval city gate stands today the Directorate of Cairo's Security (Mudīriyyah ʾAmn al-Qāhirah), at the intersection of Ahmad Maher and Port Said Streets.

(Coffeehouse Bosphorus), later known as al-Fishāwī, which stood at the entrance to the Khān al-Khalīlī Market. Other coffeehouses, especially around the al-Hussein Mosque, were frequented by its students and worshipers, as well as al-ʾAzhar students, book binders and sellers, and bohemian intellectuals, writers, and poets.[260]

In all those coffeehouses, as well as in barbershops and general stores that he happened to be in, Agent 294 eavesdropped on conversations, and participated in them. As he clarified in his own account of his service quoted above, he reported to the Khedive on those conversations that he deemed disparaging to the Khedive or the palace, or had some bearing on the inner workings of the palace. Like Shīmī Bey, Agent 294 considered the British de facto rule in Egypt, and those who supported it, to be against the Khedive, although his tone was generally less nationalistic than Shīmī Bey's.

Agent 294 was especially attuned to the newspapers, their writers, and their readers in Cairo's coffeehouses and similar public venues. As historian Ami Ayalon showed, coffeehouses in Egypt were essential to the development and consumption of print journalism. By the turn of the twentieth century, *large-scale* printing in Egypt was only about four decades old, or less, but it was already producing a rapidly growing number of books, periodicals, and newspapers. Reading habits were as diverse as the readings themselves: books and periodicals were usually read alone, in the privacy of one's home, in a library, or in a reading room. Newspapers, as well as light or satirical journals, were read mainly in coffeehouses, and to a lesser extent, also in barbershops, other shops, or even street corners. They were also read, and discussed, in groups: for the

---

[260] Abd al-Ḥalīm, *Ḥikāyah Maqāhī*, 59-69. On the expanding ranks of the effendiyyah, see chapter 2, and Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, 10-26.

literate middle class, the benefit of group-reading was the discussion about the texts; for the illiterate lower classes, having one person reading aloud to a group of illiterates was crucial. It also fit in with another long-time practice, the one of passing on information and discussing the news, political or otherwise, in coffeehouses. Coffeehouse owners kept a supply of several newspapers, of different persuasions, to cater to the demands of customers. Thus, reading and discussing the newspapers truly became a staple of coffeehouse culture, alongside other leisurely pastimes. That practice was particularly associated with effendiyyah coffeehouses, and less so with more elite, or with lower-class, ones. [261] As we will see, reading and discussing newspapers in coffeehouses helped galvanize the politically aware and activist effendiyyah that got involved in the Egyptian nationalist movement.

The reports of Agent 294 not only confirm the practice of reading and discussing the newspapers in coffeehouses, but they also shed light on their writers, when they describe them discussing and drafting their columns in coffeehouses and similar places. In one report, Agent 294 wrote to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī:

> "Sire, the day before yesterday, I was sitting in a drugstore on 1 Abd al-ʿAzīz Street, [262] where Ḥufnī al-Mahdī, Ibrāhīm who was expelled from al-ʾAzhar and known as "the tanner" [al-Dabbāgh], and the owner of [the newspaper] al-Ḥammārah, who was expelled from military service, were making several

---

[261] Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution*, 177-93.

[262] By "drugstore" (ʾajzakhānah), Agent 294 might have referred to one of the big department stores that were opened on Abd al-Aziz Street. This was a commercial thoroughfare built in the 1870s between ʿĀbdīn Palace and ʿAtabah Square, the new European-styled neighborhoods in Cairo. Such a department store, in a big building, might have had a small makeshift coffeehouse in it. Drugstores in general in that period might have accommodated lounging customers, as they, for example, used to sell "health drinks" such as carbonated water. See advertisement in an Italian-language Egyptian journal for carbonated water as a new health drink in a pharmacy: *Rigoletto: giornale artistico teatrale* (Alexandria, Egypt), no. 10 (First Year), March 16, 1899. Moreover, as the general shopping custom was to sit down in the shop over tea or coffee to negotiate business, some shops entertained longer social gatherings.

drafts that did not leave anyone [unscathed], neither a nobleman nor a lowly person. All that, while I was hearing them. That same day, when I was sitting in [the coffeehouse] at Bāb al-Faraj as usual, I heard the newspaper sellers scream at the top of their lungs: "The Khedive, the ministers, al-Ḥammārah." I sent my servant to grab one, and ordered my secretary to read it [to me]. When he looked at it, he choked, and wanted to tear it up. I did not allow it, and I attach the newspaper to this report so the order will be given to investigate it. God sufficeth, and He is the best disposer of affairs. As for the freedom of the press: I used to read the foreign newspapers, and when they were talking against one of the kings, they were tasteful about it. Informer's Comment: Were the cabinet to decide on depriving the freedom of the vile newspapers, that would have been the best. I know, Sire, very well, and I am not afraid for you or for your rule, but my allegiance to the Noble Household compels me to report anything I hear or see that is against my benefactor."[263]

This report reveals the practice of columnists to write their columns in groups, in coffeehouses and similar public places. It confirms the practice of reading those newspapers in coffeehouses, buying them straight from street sellers who roamed around them. This report also reiterates Agent 294's commitment to inform the Khedive about any disparaging publication. Consequently, Agent 294 was in favor of controlling the press, a position, and a policy recommendation, that he often repeated throughout his reports in 1901 and 1902. It should be noted that this was a hot topic in Egyptian politics during the first decade of the twentieth century. Egyptian authorities contemplated a new Press Law during those years, a stricter one than the 1881 Press Law, in which the interests of at least three major political players were at stake, each having their own mouthpieces in the press: the Khedive and his government, the British, and the budding nationalist movement. In fact, Ayalon suggests that despite the 1881 Press Law, the relative freedom enjoyed by the Egyptian press, relative to the tight censorship that

---

[263] HIL 28/7-8, date missing

Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd II imposed on the rest of the Ottoman Empire, was one of the major

reasons for the early and rapid rise of the press in Egypt, compared to other Arabic

speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire.[264]

Agent 294 certainly considered this freedom to be a problem, and he was keen on

reporting not only about those journalists that he considered to be anti-Khedive, but also

about those with ties to the British, or those who praised the British control in Egypt for

allowing them to write freely. He particularly targeted one writer, called Ḥufnī al-Mahdī,

mentioned above with his entourage of journalists and newspaper owners. The reason for

this is unclear, but it might have been just an issue of access: Agent 294 and Ḥufnī al-

Mahdī knew each other well, and they moved in the same circles, especially in the same

coffeehouses. Agent 294 sometimes pretended to be against the Khedive while he was

with Ḥufnī al-Mahdī in order to elicit anti-Khedive statements from him.[265]

Agent 294 also targeted one particular newspaper, *al-Ḥammārah*: it was a small

and short-lived newspaper, one of many satirical newspapers that flourished in Egypt at

that time, and were a very influential critical voice in politics and society.[266] In retrospect,

it seems that both Ḥufnī al-Mahdī and the newspaper *al-Ḥammārah* were quite marginal:

none of them left a lasting mark on any Egyptian intellectual or political movement. That,

in turn, makes Agent 294's reporting on them all the more important, as a rare window

---

[264] Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution,* 181, 183-4. A new Press Law was eventually promulgated in 1909: see chapter 4.

[265] HIL 28/137, February 1902; HIL 28/140, February 28, 1902; HIL 28/165, March 14(?), 1902.

[266] Al-Ḥammārah, or also: Ḥammārat Munyatī, appeared between 1899 or 1900, and1904. See: Anwar al-Jundī, *Taṭawwur al-Ṣaḥāfah al-ʿArabiyya Fī Maṣr* [The Development of the Arabic Press in Egypt] (Maṭbaʿah al-Risālah, 1967), 301; *Project Jarāʾid: A Chronology of Nineteenth-Century Periodicals in Arabic (1800-1900)*, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), https://www.zmo.de/jaraid/index.html (accessed: April 23, 2017).

into the workings of lower-tier writers and publications that served as a necessary link between the intelligentsia and political elite, and their audiences. It should be noted, however, that Agent 294 also reported, occasionally, on such influential newspapers as the pro-British *al-Muqaṭṭam* (published 1889-1952), or the pro-Khedive *al-Muʾayyad* (published 1889-1914), and on other small newspapers such as *al-Muʿtaṣim* (published 1898-?), *al-Mirṣād* (published 1898-?), or *al-Hidāyah* (published 1897-?).[267] Agent 294 also reported about their owners.

In one report, Agent 294 specifically identified one coffeehouse in the Imam al-Hussein [Mosque] neighborhood as a meeting place for journalists and readers of the newspaper *al-Muqaṭṭam*, Ḥufnī al-Mahdī among them.[268] As this was his only report to make such a clear association between one coffeehouse and one newspaper, and as Ḥufnī al-Mahdī worked for several newspapers, and frequented many places in Cairo, it is hard to extrapolate about a broad phenomenon from this one case. It is, however, an indication that such associations between coffeehouses and newspapers did, randomly, occur.

As noted, Agent 294 regularly reported on what he saw as collusion between some journalists and the British. One example is a report from February 1901, where he noted that Ḥufnī al-Mahdī was sitting in the coffeehouse of Ḥabīb al-Shāmī, on Sayyidnā al-Hussein Street (near the al-Hussein Mosque), with a group of his friends, over *al-Muqaṭṭam* newspaper, praising the acts of the British.[269] In another coffeehouse conversation, Ḥufnī al-Mahdī repeated his view that the British were "the real masters" of

---

[267] *Project Jaraʾid*
[268] HIL 28/89, March 21, 1901.
[269] HIL 28/58, February 23, 1901.

Egypt, and in a gathering at the house of one of the shaykhs, he intimated that "we are free as long as the British are in Egypt."[270] Sometimes, such conversations and gatherings could escalate into unpleasant altercations:

> "Sire, on the 14th of November [year missing, probably 1901], at 11pm, in al-Baqlī Inn [wikālah], in front of Bāb al-Faraj, [the following people] were present: the renown Ḥufnī al-Mahdī, Ibrahim al-Dabbāgh, Aḥmad ʿĀshūr, whom Ḥasan Mūsa al-ʿAqqād hires to prattle in the vile newspapers, and Muhammad al-Mahdī al-Sharqāwī, owner of *al-Hidāyah* newspaper, who is said to head the Islam Association [Jamʿiyyah al-Islām]. They all sat next to me. After they read a number of newspapers, Ḥufnī took out of his pocket the journal *al-Ḥammārah*, and said to me: do you want me to read it to you [literally: to *make you hear* some of it]? I answered "no," but he started to read [it anyway], and everybody [in the Inn] burst out laughing. But God has set upon them one of the reasonable effendis. He addressed them, pointing at Ḥufnī, and said: we say "God is the King of Creation", not "Ḥufnī is the King of Creation." Ḥufnī answered: we are free people, the newspapers are free, and we don't care about anybody, small or big. The effendi then said: then it's no use talking to you, and began admonishing them in appropriate language, till [everybody in the Inn], the noble and the lowly, heard [him]. Then, they got up and left, while the crowd jeered at them. After they left, I asked about the one who requited them, and learned that his name was Muhammad Effendi Kāmil, that he was from the al-Ḥanafī neighborhood, that his place of service was in the village of al-Dūmīn [in the Delta province of al-Daqhaliyyah], and the reason he was there was to visit [the shrine of] Imam al-Hussein."[271]

This excerpt again evinces the social practice of group-reading and discussing the newspapers – several of them in one sitting – in coffeehouses-taverns. It also shows how free some of their writers and owners felt about using them, especially the satirical newspapers, as a vehicle for political and social critique, a freedom that Agent 294, as a private eye for the highest authority in the land, found unacceptable. This report also allows us to draw some general insights about the social makeup of such scenes: it places

---

[270] HIL 28/127, May 25(?), 1902. See another coffeehouse conversation between Ḥufnī al-Mahdī and his friends from March 1902, in which they debated whether the newspaper *al-Muʿtaṣam* was pro- or anti-Khedive: HIL 28/165, March 14(?), 1902.
[271] HIL 28/1, November 14, 1901(?)

politically involved journalists, and significantly, also other members of the effendiyyah class, in this case a civil servant in one of the Delta provinces, in coffeehouses-taverns around the edges of Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo.

Ḥufnī al-Mahdī was well aware of the surveillance and control methods of the palace. In one conversation in the coffeehouse at Bāb al-Faraj, he was critical about the "new" tactics that the Khedive and the palace were employing, which consisted of throwing money at any newspaper that would support them, as well as paying or promoting any low-ranking shaykh who happened to heap empty praise upon them. Ḥufnī al-Mahdī also warned his friends about spies for the Khedive, and in another coffeehouse conversation, he even suggested that the palace was responsible for killing critics and opponents.[272] Nevertheless, none of this seemed to stop him from feeling "free," and possibly protected by the British: he continued to criticize the Khedive.

Beyond Newspapers: Coffeehouses as Information Hubs

Thus, newspapers quickly became an important vehicle for disseminating information, or news, as well as opinion and critique, ever expanding the proverbial "imagined community" of their readers in Cairo's coffeehouses. However, older forms of passing on information persisted, namely, word of mouth. Topics of such conversations varied: some were about political events of the day, such as a demand from Cromer that the Khedive would surrender the weapons in the palace's storehouses;[273] other conversations dealt

---

[272] HIL 28/137, February 1902; HIL 28/140, February 28, 1902; HIL 28/165, March 14(?), 1902
[273] Told to Agent 294 by Mirsāl Agha, Cromer's chief attendant, at a conversation in a coffeehouse near Bāb al-Faraj, on December 13, 1901, at 9:30pm: HIL 28/94, December 13(?), 1901

with events in Istanbul;[274] and many more discussed government and palace corruption, appointments, and fallouts.

An example for a major political event that became the talk of the nation, and was recorded by Agent 294, was the al-Minshāwī Affair. It was an incident that Cromer used in order to assert his authority vis-à-vis Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, and to paint the British control in Egypt, at least in British eyes, as promoting justice and reform. According to a pamphlet written by renowned British poet, publicist, and anti-imperialist, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, called "Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt," in 1902 one or two prize bulls were stolen from the Khedive's farm in the Delta region. As it was adjacent to Ahmad al-Minshāwī Pasha's farm, the Khedive asked him to exert his great influence in the region in order to identify the thieves. This he did, and in concert with the local governor, had the thieves arrested in his own house, and beaten in order to retrieve the stolen bulls. Lord Cromer saw the opportunity he needed, and had al-Minshāwī very publicly arrested and tried in Ṭanṭā for torture. He was sentenced to three months in prison, to much acclaim in the British press. Forgotten today, Blunt in his pamphlet considered it to be one incident in an escalating series of British travesties of justice that culminated in the most famous Dinshawāy Incident (1906).[275]

---

[274] For an example of a coffeehouse conversation about political events in Istanbul, see Agent 294's report about him joining a conversation between a Turkish al-ʾAzhar student and his guest from Istanbul in the coffeehouse at Bāb al-Faraj. The Istanbul shaykh told Agent 294 about the negative influence that Abu al-Huda al-Ṣayyādī, the Sultan's counselor on Arab affairs, had on him. The shaykh also told Agent 294 about some strange information delivered to Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd that the French government sent some anarchists to Istanbul to "hurt" (assassinate?) him. HIL 28/44-5, February 26, 1901.

[275] Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt*, 2nd edition with a new preface (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 3-8, 27-30. The Dinshawāy Incident was a confrontation between British soldiers and Egyptians that was used to assert British colonial control in Egypt. It was, and still is, celebrated by the Egyptian nationalist movement as a turning point in the fight for Egyptian independence (see the chapter 4).

The reports of Agent 294 confirm that this affair captivated Egyptian public opinion. "Sire," he wrote to the Khedive on May 7, 1902, "there is nothing in Cairo [or: in Egypt, "Maṣr"] these days that causes the public's [ʿāmmah] tongues to wag more than the al-Minshāwī Affair, defaming the Khedive and the men of his entourage, especially Saʿīd al-Shīmī."[276] It was already the topic of conversation in a majlis in Shaykh ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Mahdī's house back in March 1902, when a lawyer from Ṭanṭā came in and broke the first details of the story to the gathering – illustrating how such detailed information was disseminated, and not through a newspaper.[277] It was still the topic of public conversation in late May 1902, when Agent 294 visited Alexandria, as the country was waiting on a decision from the Khedive and his cabinet to pardon al-Minshāwī. It was the topic of conversation in the morning of May 17, in one of the barbershops of Alexandria; it was the topic of conversation later that afternoon in Coffeehouse al-Manshiyyah in Alexandria; and it continued to be so the next day, on the ferry back to Cairo, discussed as it was among the servants of Pashas and cabinet ministers. Coffeehouse al-Manshiyyah was full of village headmen (ʿumad), and when some of them said that Cromer would have pardoned al-Minshāwī by now, Agent 294 jumped in and decided to tell a lie in order to change the conversation so that Cromer's name would not be mentioned anymore: he said to the ʿumad gathered in the coffeehouse that the Khedive told his cabinet that he could not discriminate and pardon al-Minshāwī while not pardoning someone else for a similar offense. Some of the ʿumad agreed and even

---

[276] HIL 28/132, May 7, 1902. It is highly probable that this statement refers to our Shīmī Bey, as Agent 294 knew him.
[277] HIL 28/150-1, March 28, 1902

praised the Khedive upon hearing that.[278] This report is an interesting evidence of how government agents like Agent 294 actively manipulated coffeehouse conversations, when they saw fit to do so, in order to steer public opinion according to government interests.

Coffeehouses as Part of the Public Sphere Network

The picture that emerges from Agent 294's reporting is that of coffeehouses being a part of a network of places in which political conversations of consequence were had, or at the very least, political conversations that interested the state and its operatives. Together, these places formed the Habermasian public sphere. This network was distinguished by its social hierarchy.

At the top of that hierarchy were the Pashas and the important Shaykhs. They usually held such conversations about high politics in their clubs, as was discussed above, and in their majālis at home. Consider the following report of Agent 294 from February 7, 1902 about such a majlis:

> "I then rode carriage no. 318 in order to visit Shakīb Pasha. I found that all those present in his house were Circassians, and they were talking about the trip of the Prime Minister and the [Grand] Mufti to Upper Egypt. Every time I visit one of the notables, I hear nothing but the story of these two's trip. The intelligent ones are divided into two factions: one says that Fahmī [Mustafa Fahmī Pasha, the Prime Minister in 1891-3, and again in 1895-1908] and ʿAbduh [Muhammad ʿAbduh] were making an effort to sway the public [al-ʿāmmah] in favor of the English. They are unsuccessful in their actions as most Egyptians are leaning toward the Khedive, because he faces the world with nothing but candor. The other faction says it has a complete knowledge of their

---

[278] HIL 28/126-7, May 17(?), 1902

trip and their intentions. Since I heard the high amount of talk about their trip, I set out to report it in full."[279]

This report demonstrates well how an important political event, such as a joint trip of the Prime Minster and the Grand Mufti, became the talk of the day among the old Ottoman ruling elite of Egypt (that was the meaning of the reference to "Circassians"), who were either socially connected to the participants in that event, or had some stake in it. The conversations about that political event took place in the homes of those Pashas. Note too, that the pertinent political concern for some in that old Ottoman elite[280] was, according to Agent 294, the service that the two political leaders were rendering for British colonialism. This position runs somewhat against the grain of popular narratives that view that aristocracy as generally complicit with the British.[281] Moreover, this report recorded an interesting maneuver by the country's leaders that was aimed at connecting with, and garnering the support of, the larger populace (ʿāmmah), in a peripheral part of the country (Upper Egypt). This attempt at popular politics aroused some concern among Cairo's aristocratic elite.

---

[279] HIL 28/177, February 7, 1902.

[280] This report shows that despite the, largely successful, efforts of that Ottoman elite at "Egyptianization" (Tamṣīr), low/middle class functionaries like Agent 294 still identified them not only as Ottomans, but also by their (supposed) ethnic origin, "Circassians." See: Toledano, "Forgetting Egypt's Ottoman Past."

[281] It should be noted that after his appointment as Grand Mufti in 1899, with British help, ʿAbduh pursued policies of reform in the judicial and educational system, including in al-ʾAzhar, and in contrast to his earlier positions, preached cooperation with the British. This earned him the opposition of the Khedive, religious conservatives, and nationalists. Similarly, Mustafa Fahmī, the Prime Minister, was widely considered to be too complicit, or compliant, with the British, constantly deferring to Cromer, and allowing the British "advisers" in the different ministries to have too much power, to the point that shortly after his accession to the throne, in 1893, the young Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II tried to oust him. See: Arthur Goldschmidt, "ʿAbduh, Shaykh Muhammad," *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt* (Boulder, Colorado, and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 10; and idem., "Fahmi, Mustafa," ibid., 51.

Similarly, Agent 294 reported on many gatherings (majālis) in the houses of prominent Shaykhs, where high politics were discussed. The most mentioned majlis in this regard took place at the house of the late Muhammad al-Mahdī al-ʿAbbāsī (1827-1897), the twenty-first Shaykh al-ʾAzhar. That majlis included his family members, his former entourage, and low ranking religious functionaries from al-ʾAzhar, from other mosques and religious institutions, and from some governmental ministries. They sometimes also included a few lawyers, graduates of the Khedival Law Schools, who were emerging as a powerful social and political group at that time. Topics of conversation ranged from independence from the British and establishing a republic (jumhūriya),[282] a comparison between the relations of the Khedive and Istanbul to those between the Sharif of Mecca (ʿAwn al-Rafīq Pasha, r. 1882-1905) and Istanbul, with some unflattering and condescending remarks about the Sharif,[283] or the al-Minshāwī case and Muhammad ʿAbduh's involvement in it.[284] Many conversations turned around the relations between the Shaykhs and the palace or the Khedive himself, appointments, and honorific titles.[285]

As for masonic lodges and exclusive clubhouses, it is important to note that Agent 294 did not have a direct access to them. Nevertheless, he occasionally did report information he had heard about them elsewhere: in one report from March 15, 1901, for example, he recorded rumors about elections and appointments in some masonic lodges,

---

[282] HIL 28/18, date missing. The idea of establishing a republic has floated already during the *Urabi Revolution*, but was still a very unusual position to take in 1901-2, one that went much further than the widespread demand for a constitutional monarchy.

[283] HIL 28/52, date missing

[284] HIL 28/150-1, March 28, 1902

[285] HIL 28/38, date missing; HIL 28/45, February 26, 1901; HIL 28/88, March 21, 1901. Granting titles involved not only the Khedive, but in some cases also the Ottoman sultan.

involving the Khedive's younger brother, Prince Muhammad Ali Pasha, and Ḥufnī al-Mahdī.[286] In another report, from November 1901, he commented that Ḥufnī has increased his involvement with Freemasonry, following a conversation he heard between him and Khawājah Anton the shoemaker, in his shop.[287] This couple of reports reveal connections between people and places: a low level shaykh – and secret agent for the state – has heard stories about elitist masonic lodges in a shoemaker's store and other public places.

This kind of connections is even more apparent in Agent 294's reporting on the activities of prominent Islamic thinker Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), to whom he referred by his influential journal al-Manār, as "the owner of al-Manār" (ṣāḥib al-Manār). In one report, he quoted a lawyer in a majlis of one of the high-ranking shaykhs as saying that Riḍā was a member of the "Association of the Bridge" (Jamʿiyyah Kubrī), which was established by ʿAbduh and Prime Minister Fahmī, with the aim of making Egypt a republic under English protectorate.[288] In another report from March 1901, Agent 294 claimed that Riḍā was preaching in the Middle Egyptian town of al-Fayyūm, "even in the markets," making some three thousand people pledge allegiance on the Quran. He was so successful, that the people in al-Fayyūm opened a special place, and wrote on its door "The Sun of Islam Association" (Jamʿiyyah Shams al-Islām), as was written on his journal headquarters in Cairo.[289] If accurate, these reports are evidence for mass political organizing, which was not conducted through other organizations, such as professional

---

[286] HIL 28/77, March 15, 1901
[287] HIL 28/96, November 12, 1901
[288] HIL 28/18, date missing
[289] HIL 28/89, March 21, 1901

guilds or religious orders,[290] just a few years before the first political party, the National Party (al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī) was officially established in 1907. Note also the use of a designated place for the new organizational headquarters, and its connection to the headquarters of the journal's management, which reinforces our understanding of the role of journals in party politics at the time. Above all, if accurate, those reports confirm a connection between elite political associations and popular political organizations, in this case, through the activity of one person, Rashīd Riḍā, in both of them.

However, coffeehouses remained a prime meeting place, and an arena for political debate, for those who were not allowed, at least not regularly, in the private homes, clubs, or lodges of the Pashas and grand shaykhs. Membership in such places was gradually expanding, and new political organizations were created since the 1880s, but it was a slow and gradual process. Among the patrons of coffeehouses, the persons of interest to the state surveillance machine were, as we have seen, middle- and lower-ranking army officers, middle- and lower-level bureaucrats and government functionaries, the lower aristocracy (the Beys) and socialites, journalists, lawyers, and sometimes ʿumdahs. All of these were men who can be categorized socio-economically as middle class, or lower-upper class at most; and in more socio-cultural terms, as the effendiyyah. In their gatherings in coffeehouses, those men, as we have seen, read – and wrote – the newspapers, discussed major political events, as well as major political agendas, especially anti-British Imperialism and constitutional monarchy. They also informed each other about political appointments, fallouts, collusions, and corruption. Some places in Cairo seemed to be more prone to a certain kind of conversation or activity: the

---

[290] On the role of professional guilds in the *Urabi Revolution*, see: Cole, 164-89

coffeehouses around ʿĀbdīn Palace were populated by people who had some business with the palace, or sought some connection to it; the coffeehouses in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo were a place where journalists and other effendis congregated and discussed politics; and the coffeehouses in ʾAzbakiyyah served socialites whose immoderation outraged some critics, but who also discussed palace or elite intrigues there.

Coffeehouses as the Poor Man's Political Club

But what about the lower classes? Did their opinions count? Agent 294 seemed to think that they did not matter much, and when they did, only in a very general way. For one thing, he reported on their opinions only sporadically, expressing interest only in instances of high importance, such as al-Minshāwī affair.[291] Even then, he reported about their conversations in a very general, aggregated way, and in condescending and dismissive terms. He always lumped them together in a single category, "*al-ʿāmmah*," that is, the common people, the broad mass of the people: they were not important enough for him to be named, characterized, or differentiated from one another. Moreover, he usually did not even identify where and when he heard them talking. For example, in two closely dated reports from February 1901, he stated that the ʿāmmah did not talk about anything but the two books published by famous intellectual Qāsim Amīn, *Taḥrīr al-Marʾah* (The Liberation of Women, 1899), and *al-Marʾah al-Jadīdah* (The New Woman, 1900). He remarked that they would continue to talk about them as long as they

---

[291] See his report from May 7, 1902 quoted above, in which he stated that the common people (ʿāmmah) in Cairo talked about nothing but the al-Minshāwī affair. He added that he saw it fit not to discuss their conversations until a later date. HIL 28/132, May 7, 1902.

did "not have anything else to be occupied with."[292] This condescending view is an important indication of the popular reception and great influence of these two famous, and well-studied, books about Egyptian women. However, this was all that Agent 294 cared to detail. This instance of public opinion was apparently so strong that it was important enough to report, but not enough to elaborate upon.

In a much more detailed report from March 1902, which involved the Khedive and ʿAbduh, Agent 294 made a clear connection between them, the ʿāmmah, public opinion, the newspapers, and coffeehouses. In this report, Agent 294 described how the ʿāmmah "could not stop talking" about an article in the Pro-Khedival paper al-Muʾayyad from March 15, 1902, in which the writer told how ʿAbduh instructed him to correct the style for the Khedive from "His Majesty" (Jalālatuhu) to "His Highness" (al-Janāb al-ʿĀlī). One group among the ʿāmmah said it was a simple mistake by the writer, who did not know how to use the proper styles. Another group said what "Ḥufnī al-Mahdī said, sitting in Coffeehouse Stavros, which is in Bayn al-Nahdayn Street" in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo,[293] that the writer of the article was ordered to write "His Majesty" by the Prime Minister, who wanted the public to hear that. A third group said it was all a ruse by ʿAbduh.[294]

This is a "thick description" of the Khedive's position in the public eye, which is why it caught the attention of his secret agent, and in much more detail than any ground-breaking books about the status of women in Egyptian society. This is a story that also

---

[292] HIL 28/50, February 17, 1901; HIL 28/59, February 21, 1901

[293] Near Shaykh al-Mahdī's house. About the street, see: Ali Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-Jadīdah li-Miṣr al-Qāhirah*, first edition (Būlāq, Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubra al-Amiriyyah, 1305H [1887-8]), vol. 3, 6.

[294] HIL 28/163, March 17, 1902

involved the newspapers as a means to shape public opinion, and a Greek coffeehouse in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo as a site in which to debate and reshape that public opinion. In a similar type of reports, in which Agent 294 recorded the opinions of different "groups" (farīq, firaq) of people about high politics, he only referred to "rumors" (ʾishāʿāt), not even mentioning the ʿāmmah, or where he heard those rumors. This makes it more difficult to ascertain which social circles he was reporting on exactly, although it is safe to assume that most of these reports were also about the opinions of the lower classes, discussed in the *qahāwī baladiyyah* and other such public places.[295]

The category of ʿāmmah was part of a pre-modern terminology, which juxtaposed the 'ʿāmmah' against the 'khāṣah' (the notables), and it denoted both 'a large mass of people' as well as 'the lower-classes.' However dismissive, class-biased, and sporadic Agent 294 was in his reporting about the ʿāmmah, his recording of their opinions and discussions, as well as his grouping of them according to different, sometimes opposing, arguments, does indicate his growing understanding of the importance of public opinion, writ large. However, these reports do not indicate a consistent effort at monitoring, categorizing, and qualifying public opinion. Since that was to change in a matter of a few years, as we will see in chapter 4, the language of the aging Agent 294 can be considered as capturing a transitional moment between two state discourses about public opinion. Both responded to an expanding engagement with politics by more and more people, which in itself was a product of continued political efforts targeting the ʿāmmah on the

---

[295] See for example a report about "the spreading rumors and prattling tongues" claiming that Fūdah accused shaykh Muhammad Bakhīt of taking bribes, because of the "Zaqāzīq Case" that ʿAbduh had judged: HIL 28/91, November 23, 1901; or a report about rumors that ʿAbduh had decided to weaken the Islamic Law (Sharʿī) Courts: HIL 28/77, March 15, 1901.

part of the Khedive himself,[296] as well as political figures such as Grand Mufti ʿAbduh and Prime Minister Fahmī, who, according to Agent 294, went on a pro-British campaign in Upper Egypt, or Rashīd Riḍā, who was engaged, as Agent 294 reported, in public preaching and political organizing. Such efforts were themselves predicated on relatively new phenomena, such as the effects of print media, especially of newspapers, which generated, and rapidly disseminated, heated debates, especially through places such as coffeehouses.[297]

Despite the clear class divisions, it is clear that coffeehouses, exclusive clubs, and the majālis in upper-class homes, were parts of the same network of places in which political information and ideas were disseminated and discussed. Agent 294 made this connection between places explicit in a report from January 1902, in which he wrote about a conversation in shaykh Abd al-Khāliq al-Mahdī's house, that took place at about mid-day: shaykh Abd al-Majīd al-Sharnūbī, who heard the story from Ḥamūdah al-Jurjāwī, the Imam of ʿĀbdīn Mosque, asked the gathering why the shaykhs were herded "like donkeys" in the palace on audience day with the Khedive (something that shaykh al-Mahdī denied). "By the evening of the same day," Agent 294 continued, "I witnessed the same rumor [going around] all over the coffeehouses." In the coffeehouses, one group said that Hassan ʿĀṣim from the Palace Protocol, who was responsible for treating the shaykhs that way, was in cahoots with ʿAbduh. Another group said it was the shaykhs'

---

[296] On the efforts of Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī to bolster the public charisma of his dynasty through highly symbolized tours around the country, public celebrations, and cultural enterprises, see: Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism*; Kenneth M. Cuno, "Egypt to c. 1919," 100.

[297] Kırlı offered a similar argument about the surveillance discourse of Ottoman spies in 1840s Istanbul coffeehouses, and the political efforts of Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-39), geared toward the public. He argued that these state surveillance discourse and practices have established the public as a political entity, and legitimated its opinions. Cengiz Kırlı, "Surveillance and Constituting the Public in the Ottoman Empire," in Shami, *Publics*, 177-203.

fault for calling so much on the princes at their homes (thus debasing their status too much).[298] In short, the same story about a struggle over palace ceremonies, which was ultimately over social status and power, between the grand shaykhs and the palace, was discussed in the majālis of the shaykhs – where all the participants were important enough to be named by Agent 294 and quoted directly – as well as in the coffeehouses, where different people, aggregated by Agent 294 in nameless groups, speculated about the political motives and background of those power struggles among the social classes above them. Moreover, rumors travelled fast through this network of places.

How did information and ideas travel between the various places in that network? Through newspapers and people, according to Agent 294's reports. In a December 1901 report, he described how the paper *al-Muʾayyad* arrived at mid-day in the coffeehouse he was sitting in, near al-Hussein Mosque, carrying news on the government's decision about the estate of the late Rātib Pasha. That same evening, the ʿulamāʾ who were gathered in the late shaykh al-Mahdī's house, were reading the same newspaper and discussing the same news.[299] Besides the papers, news and ideas travelled through those people who had an easy access to more than one site of political debate: characters such as Ḥufnī al-Mahdī, whom we find at the majālis of shaykhs, in masonic lodges, in newspaper offices, and in coffeehouses, taverns and general stores; or for that matter, characters such as the low-ranking shaykh, astrologer, and healer, who was also a Khedival private eye, and used to follow his friend Ḥufnī al-Mahdī into all those places.

---

[298] HIL 28/123, January 15, 1902.
[299] HIL 28/93, December 27, 1901.

Women, Politics, and the Coffeehouse Space

Class hierarchy, and its varying social dictates, also determined the access of women to political power, and the ways in which they used space to access and exercise such power. Elite women in eighteenth century Ottoman Egypt, largely confined to their residences, used that space to enact multiple strategies aimed at achieving and consolidating political power. They successfully "maneuvered within the context of rivalries between elite households for positions of power and often came to control the wealth in a family because of their greater longevity."[300] By the end of the nineteenth century, that kind of household politics was disappearing, as the Egyptian-Ottoman elite itself was transformed: household slavery, of both women and men, was progressively abolished, while the source for Circassian slaves (*kul*), who made up most of that Ottoman elite in Egypt, was drying up; the Khedives were gradually disconnecting that elite from its Ottoman framework and entrenching it in a local, Egyptian, one; an Arabophone rural elite of large landowners has emerged, and their children went on to the city to be modern bureaucrats and professionals, thus forming a new urban middle class, or the effendiyyah. The latter demanded their own share of political power, in the form of a parliament, a constitutional monarchy, and a responsible government, while championing Egyptian nationalism and social reform, including in family structures and the role of women.

---

[300] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 10. See also: Hathaway, *The Politics of Households*; Marilyn Booth (ed.), *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

In this context, elite and upper-middle class women found new avenues, beyond their residences, for political and social action, whether in schools for girls, benevolent institutions (such as infirmaries and orphanages), associations for the advancement of women, the press, or in publishing.[301] It should be noted, however, that elite mansions, or their majālis, continued to be hubs for political information, discussion, and action, and women continued to be part of that space. For example, that report of Agent 294 from 1902 on the conversations he heard in the houses of Circassian Pashas about the trip of Prime Minister Fahmī and Grand Mufti ʿAbduh to Upper Egypt (see above), started with first hearing the story from ʿAbduh's wife. As a well-known exorcist, Agent 294 was hired for an exorcism session at a house in al-Jazīrah al-Jadīdah, an affluent part of Cairo, but he had to wait for the lady of the house, who was late:

> "I asked her about her lateness, and she said she was at the Prime Minister's house, having breakfast there. She heard that the Prime Minister will travel to Upper Egypt. She then presented me with the lady that accompanied her, and I learned that she was the wife of the [Grand] Mufti [Muhammad ʿAbduh], the Shāmiyyah [from al-Shām], and that she suffers from a demon that possessed her. The Shaykh's wife said that her husband is travelling, and that the Prime Minister is accompanying him. I asked her: do you know for what purpose are they travelling? She said that the whole world knows that the two travel for a change of air, so I did not continue to talk to her for long. My gain from her, however, was two pounds for exorcising the demon that possessed her, as I was reading [the Quran] over her until four o'clock."[302]

Coffeehouses, however, were not yet one of those spaces that elite women used for their renewed political and social activism. Huda Shaʿrāwī (1879-1947) was exactly such a product of a "transformed" elite household: her father was a large rural landowner who

---

[301] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 17-31; Badran, *Feminists*, 31-60.
[302] HIL 28/177, February 7, 1902.

rose to power and eminence in mid-nineteenth century, and her mother was a Circassian. Huda Shaʿrāwī herself was a lifelong activist and a vocal champion for women's rights, who established and headed several social enterprises and women associations, and was instrumental in reclaiming public space for the presence and activism of elite women.[303] As mentioned in chapter 2, however, in her memoirs she recalled how a European older lady once tried to convince her to go out to a coffeehouse, but she, Shaʿrāwī, adamantly refused. She claimed that going out into public places like that was not in accordance with "our customs and mores," and she framed the whole episode as some kind of a test of character. At the turn of the twentieth century, Egyptian men and women still associated the presence of women in coffeehouses with loose morals – unlike her European friend – so much so that Shaʿrāwī could not use that space for legitimate political and social activism, or for participating in the conversations that men had there about politics – although being from an elite household, she did not really need coffeehouses to talk politics. That story also emphasizes the influence of foreign, European, women on the changing roles and public presence of elite Egyptian women.[304]

The physical absence of elite female activists from coffeehouses, however, did not mean that "the woman question" was absent from its debates as well. At the turn of the twentieth century, men and women debated a range of issues concerning female education and work, veiling and seclusion, marriage and divorce, among other similar topics, which collectively became to be known as "the woman question." The debates became especially fierce with the publication of two books by intellectual Qāsim Amīn:

---

[303] Badran, *Feminists,* 31-46.
[304] Huda Shaʿrāwī, *Mudhakirāt Huda Shaʿrāwī* [Memoirs of Huda Shaʿrāwī], electronic reproduction (Cairo: Kutub ʿArabiyyah, 2007), 119-21.

Taḥrīr al-Marʾah (The Liberation of Women, 1899), and *al-Marʾah al-Jadīdah* (The New Woman, 1900). As historian Beth Baron noted, "the woman question" became a field upon which religious- and secularly-oriented nationalists pitched their battles over the cultural content of Egyptian nationalism.[305] But these debates did not rage only over the pages of journals and newspapers, or later in parliament: as Agent 294 reported in February 1901, even "the ʿāmmah" talked about nothing else than the two books by Amīn.[306] They most probably talked about them in their coffeehouses, which thus became the poor man's parliament.

Conclusion

Just how instrumental were coffeehouses at the turn of the twentieth century for galvanizing a political consciousness, we can glean from the memoirs of leading intellectual Ahmad Amīn (1886-1954). Coming from a self-described "extremely religious," and "strict," family background in Cairo, he moved to Alexandria at eighteen, around 1904, in order to teach Arabic at the Rātib Pasha School there. In Alexandria he met another, older, Arabic teacher (the shaykh Abd al-Ḥakīm bin Muhammad), a Sufi of the Naqshabandiyyah Order, and a follower of reformist ʿAbduh. This "big-brother" fellow teacher, as Amīn described him, had a transformative effect on young Amīn's mind: "I was torpid and he awakened me, I was blind and he made me see, I was a slave to tradition and he freed me, I was narrow minded and he broadened it." This

---

[305] Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 31-9. To put Amīn's work in perspective of women writing and taking action for their rights in the preceding decade or so, see: Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied*. For a biographical study of Qāsim Amīn, see: Muhammad ʿImārah, *Qāsim Amīn wa-Taḥrīr al-Marʾah* [Qāsim Amin and the Liberation of Women] (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1980).
[306] HIL 28/50, February 17, 1901; HIL 28/59, February 21, 1901

transformation took place in Alexandria's grand coffeehouses, either in the area of al-Raml Station (and grand square), or in Casino al-Max [al-Maks, probably around the al-Max neighborhood], and in "other such fine places" with good air and a good view of the Mediterranean, which sometimes also had music playing. Always with another friend or two at the coffeehouse, this mentor-colleague would "critically examine society with expertise, and talk about its agricultural, economic, political, and social issues." Sometimes Amīn also visited him at home, where he would discuss his own great teachers in detail, or they would read one of the classical books about Islamics, while one of his friends would sometimes tell jokes.[307]

In addition to being mentored about the "the world around [him]" in Alexandria's grand coffeehouses, Amīn also used to sit around a small neighborhood coffeehouse[308] near his home, the place of Uncle Ahmad al-Sharbatlī. Uncle al-Sharbatlī made the best lemonade, and was also very keen on poetry, thus attracting an "elegant and cultured" crowd. Amīn used to go there to read the newspapers, which introduced him to the national political debate, especially as in his early years newspapers did not enter his conservative home, and he "did not use to sit around coffeehouses to [be able to] read them in." Specifically in al-Sharbatlī's coffeehouse, Amīn read *al-Liwāʾ*, whose "inflammatory" and nationalistic tone he did not like at the time, *al-Muqaṭṭam*, whose (pro-British and) "anti-nationalistic" tone he did not like either, and (the pro-Khedive) *al-*

---

[307] ʾAḥmad ʾAmīn, *Ḥayātī* [My Life], first edition (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1969), 105-12.
[308] Amīn called it a "place/shop" (maḥall), a "tavern/shop" (ḥānūt), and a "coffeehouse" (maqha) interchangeably.

Muʾayyad, which he liked for its "Islamist tone;" that is, until the Dinshawāy Incident (1906) swayed him to *al-Liwāʾ*'s side.[309]

Ahmad Amīn's experiences in Alexandria's (and Cairo's) coffeehouses corroborated, then, the picture painted by Agent 294: coffeehouses at the turn of the twentieth century were a place where political debate was rife, either over current affairs (especially nationalist politics), or over social and cultural issues. Amīn's memoirs add to the state-spy's reports a non-state, individual, point of view, which shows just how powerful coffeehouses could be in shaping political and social awareness, whether through peers and mentors, or through the newspapers. Agent 294's reports show that patrons of coffeehouses, both middle- and lower-class, were as much interested as the political elite in the struggles over power, prestige, and control between the British colonial administration and the Egyptian government, or between different factions inside the Egyptian ruling class and governmental structures. Those reports also show that coffeehouse patrons were very much interested in the maneuverings of political figures in Cairo, and even in Istanbul.

Both Amīn's account and Agent 294's reports also show that coffeehouses could not be categorized, or mapped, according to specific political affiliations. If we use newspapers as an indication of political affiliation at that time, then only once, did Agent 294 explicitly associate one coffeehouse in the Imam al-Hussein neighborhood with journalists and readers of *al-Muqaṭṭam*,[310] but this seems to have been the exception, rather than the rule. His other reports, as well as Amīn's testimony above, indicate that

---

[309] ʾAmīn, *Ḥayātī*, ibid.
[310] HIL 28/89, March 21, 1901.

several competing newspapers were read in the same coffeehouses, either bought directly

by patrons from newspaper-sellers who roamed around coffeehouses, or provided by

coffeehouse owners.[311] This meant that coffeehouses offered a space for a vivid debate

and exchange of ideas, as opposed to proverbial 'echo chambers' typical of twenty-first-

century media and political landscape. As a result, coffeehouses helped in creating a

robust structure for public opinion, and in galvanizing political groups and classes, for

whom political engagement was indeed a cultural marker of class or group, especially the

effendiyyah.

Coffeehouses, however, could be categorized by class, and roughly mapped

across the city by functionality. According to Agent 294's reports, coffeehouses in Cairo

around ʿĀbdīn Palace were frequented more by people who had business there; while

small coffeehouses on the edge of Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, or around al-Hussein

Mosque, were frequented by the effendiyya, who immersed themselves in talking about

current affairs. Patrons of coffeehouses around ʾAzbakiyyah were more prone to elite and

palace intrigue, as they frequently came from that class of people, although major

exceptions did exist, such as Coffeehouse Matatia, which might be considered to have

been functioning more as a private clubhouse.

As twentieth-century coffeehouses in Cairo (and elsewhere) proved to be a major

site for public political discourse, how, then, did they contribute to the shaping of an

Egyptian public sphere at the time? Did they help create a (bourgeois) civil society that

pressured and restricted political authority, on the way to democracy, as Habermas

suggested for eighteenth-century Europe? Did they epitomize some other kind of

---

[311] Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution,* 180.

relationship between state and society, which was less confrontational, as critics of Habermas have suggested?

Coffeehouses certainly were of high interest to the state that has closely surveilled them. But, efforts to control and limit political debate in coffeehouses, or the flow of political information there, seem to have been very minimal in 1901-2 Cairo, according to Agent 294's reports. These did not mention any closure of coffeehouses for political reasons, or any prohibition on conversations there. At most, state agents like Agent 294 sometimes intervened in coffeehouse conversations in order to sway them one way or another. Moreover, coffeehouse patrons seem to have been tenacious in keeping them as safe spaces for engaging in political discussion: they were well aware that coffeehouses were under state surveillance, and sometimes worried, justifiably or not, about state efforts at cooptation or retaliation, even their own personal safety. Nevertheless, it evidently did not deter them from keeping on using coffeehouses as a space in which to express and exchange their opinions on current affairs, a space that they carved out especially for that purpose.

This seemingly independent, and sometimes contrarian, function of Cairo's coffeehouses vis-à-vis the state at the turn of the twentieth century indeed corresponds, to an extent, with Habermas' descriptions of the power relationship between state and society characteristic of the public sphere. This is not to say that coffeehouses alone brought about European-style "democratization" to Egypt, as the demands for a constitutional monarchy at that time came from many quarters, expressed varied interests, and had many sources of inspiration. However, it is fair to say that the established practice of discussing that kind of issues in coffeehouses, and the galvanizing effect it

had on public opinion, must have contributed to the development of such demands, and to their spread. That said, the class-based differences between coffeehouses did mean that they were not all-inclusive as Habermas suggested, and that they reflected class-based political interests and engagement.

The kind of discourse apparent in Agent 294's reporting begs the question of *who* was 'the state,' rather than *what* was 'the state.' Scholars usually consider this kind of personalization of authority as a hallmark of pre-modern political organization, but Agent 294's reporting from the start of the twentieth century might suggest it is worth exploring in patently modern contexts as well. There are some clear answers to the question '*who* was the state': for example, the Khedive, his cabinet, the British consul-general, the top functionaries in the administration, such as the Grand Mufti, or the British ministerial 'advisers:' they were always 'the state.' In other cases the lines between 'state' and 'society' were much more fuzzy: were the Pashas and grand shaykhs who did not hold an official position, but have in the past and would in the future, those who current top officials consulted with and feared from, those who mingled in the same majālis, were they considered 'the state'? Were petty bureaucrats, such as the effendi Muhammad Kāmil who worked in al-Dūmīn village and came to Agent 294's aid in a tavern altercation while visiting Cairo, was he 'the state'? He was a 'state functionary' after all? Asking who, rather than what, was the state can bring into focus the situational quality of the boundaries and interactions between state and society, or in other words, it can better historicize the relationship between them. This meant that the same person could sometimes embody the state, its interests, and its actions, and in other times could not. It depended on the actual spaces (official or not) where that person interacted with others,

on the time of day – 'official time' or not – when those interactions took place, and on other circumstances. This, in turn, can iron out some of the difficulties created by talking about state and society in abstract terms, make the contact points and interactions between them clearer and more concrete, and account more fully for other forces at play in such interactions or confrontations, such as class, for example.[312]

How, then, did coffeehouses function as a public sphere? For one thing, it is evident from Agent 294's reports that they served as a regular meeting place for regular groups of friends, such as Ḥufnī al-Mahdī and his entourage, who frequented, if not the same coffeehouse, then several regular ones, roughly in the same area of town. At the same time, coffeehouses were also a meeting place for people who met there for the first time – and Agent 294 provided ample anthropological detail about how one would approach a stranger in a coffeehouse. This was crucial for coffeehouses to function as a vehicle for socializing, creating, and expanding social and political groups. Thus, coffeehouses provided a more concrete sense to the expansion of socio-political communities, proving that these were not entirely 'imagined,' as some proverbial interpretations of Benedict Anderson might have it. Moreover, coffeehouses were also the prime location for consuming the print media that promoted such 'imagined' constructions.[313]

Most importantly, the reports of Agent 294 showed that Cairo's coffeehouses operated as part of a network, a grid. On an equal (horizontal) level, coffeehouses,

---

[312] For an example of a historical study approaching the personal connections between state, society, culture, colonialism, and nationalism, see: Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[313] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London, New York: Verso, 2006).

especially the neighborhood ones in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, formed a distinctive public sphere together with barbershops, taverns (or coffeehouses where alcohol was also served), and shops.[314] It is no coincidence that all these small places where people regularly met and sat down to talk were interconnected: they were physically adjacent to each other. In fact, coffee or tea was usually delivered to the other places, frequently by young boys, from the adjacent coffeehouses.

On a hierarchical (vertical) level, coffeehouses were one place out of several, where people of different classes gathered to discuss politics. Taken together, these formed the larger public sphere, and together produced public opinion. From top to bottom of the social hierarchy, these were: the majālis of Pashas and grand Shaykhs in their own homes; exclusive clubhouses and Masonic lodges; elite coffeehouses, such as, but not limited to, the ones in ʾAzbakiyyah; effendiyya coffeehouses, such as, but not limited to, the ones in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, ʿĀbdīn, or Downtown Cairo; and the *qahāwī baladiyyah*, which Agent 294 did not report about much.

As previously discussed in length, the boundaries between adjacent classes and places were porous, but at the same time distinctive enough. What turned those places into different parts of the same network, or public sphere, was the easy and rapid travel of news and opinion between them. As Agent 294's reports show, the same news could be discussed in some majlis of a prominent shaykh at mid-day, and all over Cairo's coffeehouses in the afternoon. Moreover, discussions that started in one place spilled to another. Agent 294's reports show that there were two main vehicles for the transmission

---

[314] Especially those shops that still catered to the older type of shopping habits, that is, the type where customers sat down with the sellers in the shop to discuss the purchase.

of information and opinion between those places: one was those people who had access to, and frequented, more than one kind of place, people such as Ḥufnī al-Mahdī, or Agent 294 himself, both of whom went in and out majālis, newspaper offices, and coffeehouses. The other kind of vehicle was only a few decades old at the beginning of the twentieth century, but was spreading quickly and effectively: the newspapers that printed news, opinion, and political satire, and were read and discussed in groups at exclusive clubhouses, majālis in various private homes, and, of course, in coffeehouses.

In his study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century small neighborhood coffeehouses in Istanbul, Mikhail challenged Habermas' dichotomy between the public and the private spheres, by arguing that those coffeehouses occupied a middle-ground on a spectrum between the two.[315] However, conceptualizing a network, rather than a spectrum, a network that was comprised of interconnected, but separate, private and public places where political news and opinions were circulated and shaped, obviates the need to see any one part of it, such as coffeehouses, as a hybrid. Moreover, conceptualizing such a network complicates our understanding of the actual composition of the public sphere: public opinion was shaped not only in public sites, but also in private homes, as long as they served as a regular meeting place for enough people with a regular core membership. It is worth remembering that all such sites, even public coffeehouses, had both inclusionary and exclusionary practices, some strict and formal, such as clubhouses and Masonic lodges, and some only implicit and practical, such as coffeehouses. Finally, conceptualizing a network of places might allow us to focus on, and historicize the points of contact between the different places in that network, offering

---

[315] Mikhail, "The Heart's Desire."

us a better way to look at state-society interactions or confrontations over the public sphere. Different people in those different places may have had different and competing opinions, perspectives, agendas, and interests, but widespread political engagement all across Cairo was becoming a significant political force.

Chapter 4:

Cairo's Coffeehouses and Nationalist Mass Politics, 1907-1919

Introduction

Talking politics soon turned into nationalist popular activism. A few developments contributed to this: first, by the early years of the twentieth century, the British have been deepening and consolidating their hold on the Egyptian administration, as more and more British, French, Italian, and other European functionaries were appointed in all levels of the Egyptian bureaucracy, in the army, in the police, even as teachers in schools. This came at the expense of Egyptian graduates aiming at a government job, thus only deepening their grievances against British colonialism. At the same time, more European investors and immigrants than ever before kept arriving in Egypt in order to take advantage of its economic boom. They created more European owned and managed companies and businesses, which also increased Egyptian resentment toward perceived foreign take-over of the Egyptian private sector.[316]

Moreover, if in the 1880s British colonizers such as Lord Cromer used to claim that the British presence in Egypt aimed only at helping it with reforms that would lead it

---

[316] Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 58-9; Cuno, "Egypt to c. 1919," 101.

to regaining full independence, then by the 1900s, they were quite openly confident that British colonialism was an entrenched reality, that it was there to stay. They exhibited these intentions not only through public power struggles between Cromer and Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, as we have seen with the al-Minshāwī Affair for example, but also through repeated shows of British power and superiority over the local population, using exemplary punishment that circumvented Egyptian authority.

The most egregious such incident was the Dinshawāy Incident: in June 1906, a group of British officers hunted for sport the pigeons that were a source of livelihood for the people of the Delta village of Dinshawāy. Their gun shots also caused a fire in the village. In the ensuing scuffle, a number of villagers, including the wife of the local Imam, were shot, some fatally, and one of the British officers died of concussion and sunstroke. Lord Cromer ordered a special tribunal that had the powers to try the villagers more swiftly and with more severity than any other Egyptian tribunal, because British army officers were harmed. The tribunal was headed by then Egyptian foreign minister, and later prime minister, Boutros Ghālī (1846-1910), but it was controlled by the British; its sentences were exceptionally harsh, and ranged from hanging, to public flogging, to extended imprisonment for a large number of the villagers.[317]

The Dinshawāy Incident proved to be a turning point. The nationalist leader, Mustafa Kāmil, and his mouthpiece *al-Liwāʾ* seized the opportunity to vehemently rebuke British occupation and demand Egyptian independence, while quickly turning it into a national myth.[318] Feelings ran high. Ahmad Amīn described in his memoirs reading

---

[317] Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 60-1; Cuno, "Egypt to c. 1919," 102.
[318] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 177-84.

about the sentences in the newspapers with his friends over dinner: the news brought them to tears, and from then on "my feelings turned over to *al-Liwāʾ*, not to *al-Muʾayyad*, and not to *al-Muqaṭṭam*."[319] The exemplary trial and the disproportional sentences were criticized even in London, causing Lord Cromer to retire. Most importantly, it prompted the Khedive and his government to allow, in 1907, the formation of political parties. Three parties were quickly formed: *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī* (the Nationalist Party) of Mustafa Kāmil, *Ḥizb al-ʾUmmah* (the Nation Party), whose chief intellectual was Ahmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid (1872-1963), representing the elite Pashas and their gradual approach towards independence and constitutionalism, and *Ḥizb al-ʾIṣlāḥ ʿala al-Mabādiʾ al-Dustūriyyah* (the Constitutional Reform Party), of Shaykh Ali Yūsuf, the editor of the pro-Khedival *al-Muʾayyad*.[320]

Al-Waṭanī was by far the most popular, and populist, party. Following the British-French *Entente Cordiale*[321] in 1904, its leaders were disillusioned with achieving independence through campaigning in France, and in other European countries, so they would pressure Britain to withdraw from Egypt. Therefore, they came to the realization that effective pressure for ending British colonialism would only come from within Egypt itself, although they never stopped campaigning for European support, especially from Germany and Italy. Thus, *al-Waṭanī* turned to enlisting the widest popular support possible, engaging as many people as it could reach, from across the social gamut, and galvanizing them for sustained political action. It ushered in a period of large

---

[319] Amīn, *Ḥayātī*, 111-2.
[320] Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 61.
[321] The *Entente Cordiale* was a series of agreements between Britain and France settling colonial disputes around the world, and parceling out zones of colonial influence. It gave Britain a free hand in Egypt, in exchange for a free hand for the French in Morocco.

demonstrations, inflammatory public speeches, articles, and pamphlets, strikes, political
assassinations, and secret societies. All this activism focused on two political objectives:
independence from British colonialism, and a constitutional government. By
independence *al-Waṭanī* meant the complete withdrawal of British colonial
administration and army from Egypt – a demand that would bring it into conflict with the
Wafd in the 1920s and 1930s over the presence of the British army in independent Egypt
– and by constitutional government *al-Waṭanī* meant the promulgation of a constitution
and the election of a powerful parliament that would put an end to "tyranny," and ensure
greater participation of the public in government. The surge in mass activism that *al-
Waṭanī* led, especially in 1909-1910, experienced a lull during the First World War years
(1914-1918), due to its suppression by British martial law, only to erupt with greater
force during what became to be known as the *1919 Revolution*.[322]

In this chapter, I will explore the role that Cairo's coffeehouses played in this
surge of mass politics between 1907 and 1914, and then during 1919. I will describe how
political activists used coffeehouses for debating, campaigning, mobilizing, conspiring,
inspiring, and recruiting. I will consider what that meant for the role of coffeehouses in
galvanizing public opinion, for their role in the changing networks that made up the
public sphere, and for the struggle between state and society over that sphere. I will again
rely for doing so mainly on state surveillance records, first on copies of Egyptian police
reports found in the *Abbas Ḥilmī Papers* from 1908 through 1910, and then on British
Military Intelligence reports from 1919.

---

[322] Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., "The Egyptian Nationalist Party" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1968), 111-
234; Malak Badrawi, *Political Violence in Egypt, 1910-1924: Secret Societies, Plots and Assassinations*
(Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2000), 1-22.

Al-Waṭanī's Turn to Mass Politics, and the Response of the State's Surveillance Apparatus

The turn of *al-Waṭanī* to mass politics already had historical experiences to rely on. The memory of mass protest during the *Urabi Revolution* in Cairo, Alexandria, and other towns across Egypt, was still fresh.[323] As we saw in chapter 3, Khedival agent number 294 reported already in 1901-2 about the efforts of Rashīd Riḍā at galvanizing and organizing thousands of supporters in al-Fayyūm, or about the plans of senior officials Mustafa Fahmī and Muhammad ʿAbduh to campaign in Upper Egypt. Mass events, such as the highly symbolized tours and public celebrations of Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, or the mass funeral of Mustafa Kāmil in 1908, after which students of both sexes wore black bands on their arms during the forty days of morning,[324] themselves helped to maintain and create a sense of a greater Egyptian public. Print media, and public meeting places such as coffeehouses, which were intimately connected with each other, already contributed immensely to the creation and expansion of that Egyptian public, and to its engagement with politics. Politics were no longer the privy of the high and mighty in their majālis, clubs, or lodges.

The press itself became more radicalized, especially after Pan-Islamic journalist, orator, and educator, Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Jāwīsh (1876-1929), took over the editorship of *al-Liwāʾ* following Kāmil's death. *Al-Liwāʾ* became ever more popular, and its pages lambasted in increasingly harsh terms the British occupation, or Khedival and

---

[323] Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 190-213.
[324] Badrawi, *Political Violence,* 21, n. 67; Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 192-3.

governmental "despotism." Jāwīsh was tried four times for his anti-British articles, served two prison terms, and was eventually exiled in 1912.[325] The radicalized and inflammatory tone of the daily newspapers, as well as the satirical ones and other publications, became so pervasive, that in 1909 the Khedive and his government, headed now by Boutros Ghālī, finally promulgated a new Press Law (something that people like Agent 294 advocated for as early as 1901-2). The new Press Law gave the government more control over publishing and printing, and facilitated censorship. As this issue was a matter of public debate for years, it was met with mass demonstrations.[326] The new law, however, did not completely stop the publication of fiery newspaper articles that called for action, and it certainly failed to extinguish cutting slogans from being hurled in demonstrations, or, for that matter, popular jokes, satirical poems (zajal), and popular songs (ṭaqṭuqah), that took aim at British colonialism, the Khedive, and his cabinet. These further reinforced the sense of an Egyptian national community, and the sense of an active public sphere.[327] As we shall see below, they also helped to radicalize the space of coffeehouses, since coffeehouses were the place where newspapers, jokes, satire, and songs were sounded.

The turn of the *al-Waṭanī* party to mass politics was facilitated not only by its radical use of its media organs, but also by the effective use of its various organizations, especially its schools. In the immediate years after Kāmil's death in 1908, *al-Waṭanī*

---

[325] See, for example: Goldschmidt, "Jawish, Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz," *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*, 96-7, and the bibliography there.

[326] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 195-9; Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 205-12.

[327] On the radicalization of the Egyptian press, and its expression in popular culture, between 1907 and 1919, see: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 186-243. On the previous development of zajal, ṭaqṭuqah, and other forms of popular culture in a nationalist context, see: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 120-86.

established several schools – primary, secondary, and night schools for workers – a clubhouse in Cairo, and even consumer cooperatives. The party used its different schools for nationalist indoctrination, for hosting public speeches by its leaders and operatives, and for hosting large gatherings and protests.[328] Consequently, many of the active participants in the protests and demonstrations were students from the *al-Waṭanī* schools. Crucially, students and leaders of *al-Waṭanī* quickly succeeded in recruiting other students for their demonstrations, strikes, and walk-outs. Most importantly, *al-Waṭanī* succeeded in recruiting the students of al-ʾAzhar, and the students of the state Law School. Many nationalist students, graduates, and young activists, also formed their own "secret," or quasi-secret, societies, with or without formal ties to the *al-Waṭanī*, but with its knowledge and blessing. These societies were concerned with charity, community and character building, school work when relevant, and sometimes also financial ventures, but they mostly engaged in nationalist debate, indoctrination, and organizing. Their "secret" aspect consisted mostly of initiation ceremonies – perhaps inspired by Masonic rituals – which fueled and added to the excitement of its young members.[329] They usually met on school grounds, in the *al-Waṭanī* clubhouse, in members' houses, and, as we shall see, in coffeehouses.

Al-Waṭanī also endeavored to reach the working class. Already in the end of the 19th century, Egyptian workers formed unions, and took industrial action, inspired in part by the activism of European workers in Egypt. But new syndications, such as those of cigarette rollers, tramway workers, manual workers, or carriage drivers, kept being

---

[328] Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 170, 194-7.
[329] Badrawi, *Political Violence*, 1-22, 55-112.

established, and some were headed, by senior figures in *al-Waṭanī*. If they were not formally connected to *al-Waṭanī*, then party speakers were invited to speak in their meetings. As noted above, the party also opened night schools for workers, which were mainly aimed at nationalist indoctrination. Workers continued to stage strikes, and they also participated in nationalist demonstrations.[330]

Demonstrations became a regular occurrence. Their time and place of gathering were advertised in the newspapers. They turned out hundreds of participants, sometime even more. They usually started with a large rally or gathering, where fiery speeches were made, and then they turned into processions or marches. The marches were usually launched from, or ended in, ʾAzbakiyyah Gardens, or the gardens at the affluent neighborhood of al-Jazīrah. Some processions passed by, or ended up at, iconic landmarks in those new areas of Cairo, such as the Suez Canal Company headquarters, Shepheards Hotel, newspapers headquarters such as those of *al-ʾAhrām* or *al-Muʾayyad*, the *al-Waṭanī* club, or one of the city's squares. The police usually intervened to stop the processions and make arrests only when the demonstrators tried to reach sensitive places such as the General Assembly, the British Residency at Qaṣr al-Dūbārah, or ʿĀbdīn Palace.[331]

The general atmosphere of mass politics, protest, and activism gave impetus to one of the major events in Egypt's political history of the time: the assassination of Prime Minister Boutros Ghālī in February 1910. His assassin was Ibrahim Nāṣif al-Wardānī, a

---

[330] Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (London: Tauris, 1988), 35-7, 66-72; Badrawi, *Political Violence*, 6-9; Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 196-9. For a more general context, see also: Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 49-82.
[331] Badrawi, *Political Violence*, 10-5; Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 200-12.

young pharmacist, who was an *al-Waṭanī* supporter, and a member of an *al-Waṭanī*-inspired secret society. In his interrogation and trial, he admitted to the political motives of the assassination: like many, he resented Ghālī's role in the Dinshawāy Incident, viewed him as a collaborator with the British, and was enraged by Ghālī's "arrogant" and "tyrannical" dismissal of parliamentary concerns regarding the new Press Law.[332] Although he was promptly tried and executed, his act introduced political violence into the Egyptian political scene. In the years to come, this would include several assassinations or assassination attempts, as well as threats of violence, such as sending threat letters to senior officials and politicians by some nationalist secret society or another.

The surveillance and policing methods of the Egyptian security services evolved in response to the changing political challenges. On the central level, the police department (qism al-ḍabṭ) in the Interior Ministry (niẓārah al-dākhiliyyah) was reorganized in 1909, for the first time since its establishment in 1895. Now it was divided into three central bureaus (qalam): bureau "A," which dealt with crime prevention, bureau "B," which dealt with detection of crimes, and criminal statistics, and bureau "C," which dealt with supporting technologies (such as forensic medicine). Still, it was the Cairo police (specifically, the police bureau in Cairo's governorate: qalam ḍabṭ muḥāfaẓah al-qāhirah) that was responsible for surveilling the political organizations and their activity, but it reported now to "Bureau B" in the Interior Ministry.[333]

---

[332] The Egyptian General Assembly at the time had only consultative powers, with no legislative or veto powers. Badrawi, *Political Violence*, 22-78.
[333] Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 37-42.

That soon changed yet again after the assassination of Boutros Ghālī, as it became clear that the Egyptian police did not have any idea about the existence and activity of the nationalist secret societies. Therefore, a "secret political bureau" was established in 1910, inside Cairo's police, which reported both to the city police, from which it was recruited, and also to "Bureau B." It was responsible for surveilling the secret societies in all of Egypt, as well as the activity of *al-Waṭanī* in general, including its ties to foreign powers (especially Germany, and the Committee for Union and Progress government in Istanbul). This "political bureau" did so by spying on any known nationalist, but it also used secret agents to cajole, and sometimes frame, the people it targeted. The overall effect of this bureau's activity was to reinforce the association of *al-Waṭanī* with political violence and clandestine activity, reinforce its status as a dangerous challenge to both British and Egyptian authorities, and inter alia, strengthen its position as the sole effective nationalist force in Egyptian politics.[334]

Cairo's Coffeehouses, Mass Politics, and Public Opinion

The papers of Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī II hold hundreds of reports monitoring the activity of *al-Waṭanī*, mass politics, and public opinion during the pre-War years (1907-1914). Many are hand-written memos (mudhakkirah-s), or reports (taqrīr-s), in Arabic, from the Interior Ministry, that is, the analytical digests produced on the ministerial level, based on reports reaching it from police forces on the ground. The Khedive's archive also holds some of the more rudimentary reports from the Cairo (and rarely, also Alexandria) Governorate Police Command, as well as some reports from paid informers, and letters

---

[334] Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 43-69.

from concerned citizens or friends of the Khedive. Malak Badrawi used those documents in her study on political violence in Egypt during that period,[335] but they still offer room for more studies on the grass-roots organization of *al-Waṭanī*, its party machinery, and how it used them to politically engage growing numbers of people.

Those surveillance documents clearly established *al-Waṭanī* as the primary political concern of, even danger to, the Khedive and the Egyptian government. They gave special attention to the ties between nationalists and al-ʾAzhar students, as well as to the various societies with Islamic or Pan-Islamic leanings, and their ties with the Ottoman government.[336] They show how Egyptian police monitored meetings and rallies, especially in the *al-Waṭanī* schools,[337] in its clubhouse, headquarters, and *al-Liwāʾ* offices. The police also monitored rallies in ʾAzbakiyyah Gardens and other public places,[338] gatherings in al-ʾAzhar, and even theater plays with anti-British and anti-government messages.[339] Police agents recorded the numbers and identity of participants,

---

[335] Badrawi, *Political Violence*, especially the first four chapters.

[336] The Khedive and his government have long worried about Ottoman meddling in Egyptian politics, especially about the Pan-Islamic policy of Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd II, and the policies of the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) government that overthrew him. They also worried about the ties of *al-Waṭanī* and the nationalist societies with Istanbul. See, for example, a memo from the Interior Ministry about the celebrations of Ottoman Constitution Day (ʿīd al-Dustūr al-ʿUthmānī), detailing the celebrations staged by a couple of pan-Islamic societies in their schools, and the celebrations in *al-Liwāʾ* offices and in the *al-Waṭanī* club. It also gave details on a peaceful celebratory procession of Jewish (ʾIsrāʾīliyūn) bank employees and shopkeepers, that set out from al-Muskī neighborhood to ʾAzbakiyyah Gardens. The gardens were decorated with electric lights, as were some shops of Syrians (Sūriyūn). The Jewish marchers praised the new Sultan Mehmet V (r. 1909-18), and some nationalist bystanders joined them: HIL 6/151-2, July 24, 1909. On the relationship between *al-Waṭanī* and Istanbul, both under Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd and under the CUP, see: Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 212-9.

[337] See, for example, a Cairo Police "secret memo" about a meeting of Jamʿiyyah al-Muwāsāh al-ʾIslāmiyyah (The Islamic Charity Society), established by *al-Liwāʾ*'s editor Shaykh Jāwīsh, in its headquarters at al-Kamāl School, behind ʿĀbdīn Palace: HIL 6/309-11, November 28, 1909.

[338] For examples of Interior Ministry and Cairo Police memos about rallies in ʾAzbakiyyah or al-Jazīrah Gardens, see: HIL 6/266, November 1, 1909; HIL 6/306, November 24, 1909; HIL 6/307, November 25, 1909.

[339] See memos from the Interior Ministry about theater plays performed at *al-Waṭanī* night schools in poor neighborhoods such as Sayyidah Zaynab. One of the plays criticized British oppression that caused the Ministry of Education to pressure students, while the government did nothing to stop it: HIL 6/86-7, May 6,

exact times of the rallies, and the speeches made.[340] They recorded in the same way demonstrations and processions, strikes, or meetings of workers,[341] and as in the past, also political conversations heard at various meeting places of suspected activists.[342]

Coffeehouses were such a meeting place. In a memo from April 1909, signed "The Interior Minister," its readers were informed that

> "…some of the people [ʾahālī] of Bāb al-Shaʿriyyah neighborhood [a popular neighborhood in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo] meet in a coffeehouse there, on al-Ṭamār Street, and talk politics [yataḥadathūn fī al-siyāsah]. Last Wednesday they met at this coffeehouse, and said that the Istanbul Strife [Fitna al-Istānah: the failed countercoup of Sultan Abd al-Ḥamīd II in April 1909 against the CUP government] was organized by the English, and that His Highness the Khedive supported them in Egypt. One of those present [in the coffeehouse], the shaykh Ahmad al-Tarīsī, formerly a teacher in al-ʾAzhar, happened upon the conversation, and started criticizing the policies of His Highness… Then they started criticizing Shaykh Ali Yūsuf, owner of *al-Muʾayyad,* blaming him for the return of the Press Law and similar things."[343]

The memo went on to detail a fiery "political sermon" in that neighborhood's mosque, which criticized the collaboration between the Khedive, the Egyptian

---

1909; HIL 6/83, May 1, 1909. On the nationalist-leaning theater at the time, see: Ramsīs ʿAwaḍ, *ʾIttijāhāt Siyāsiyyah fī al-Masraḥ qabla Thawrah 1919* [Political Orientations in the Theater before the 1919 Revolution] (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Maṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 1979). On the popular theater and nationalism during that period, see also: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 186-243.

[340] Police agents meticulously recorded the speeches that were made in meetings, rallies, and demonstrations. It would be interesting to compare these speeches with the rarified press articles about national or civilizational identities and current politics, in order to see how such ideas were "translated-down" for oratory mass consumption. See examples of such speeches in: HIL 6/265, October 28, 1909; HIL 6/313-4, November 28, 1909.

[341] See memo from the Interior Ministry about a rally in Qaṣr al-Nīl Gardens, where workers debated forming a union (and decided against it): HIL 6/48, March 25, 1909. See another Interior Ministry memo on tram drivers forming a committee, and their demands: HIL 6/45, March 17, 1909; and another report on the formation of a Workers Party (Ḥizb al-ʿUmmāl) in Cairo: HIL 6/89, date missing, probably from 1909.

[342] See, for example, a memo from the Interior Ministry about one Lamʿī effendi, a chief engineer and *al-Waṭanī* member, who was fired by Prince (later Sultan) Hussein Kāmil (r. 1914-1917), complaining to his friends, in an unspecified location, about the Khedive's subservience to the British. See in the same memo, a report about Ahmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid saying to his friends that the Khedive succeeded in cooping most of *al-ʾUmmah* Party's membership: HIL 6/86-7, May 6, 1909.

[343] HIL 6/69, April 24, 1909.

government, and the British occupation, attacked the Press Law, and urged unity in the

Islamic Nation (ʾUmmah), in light of the events in Istanbul. The preacher also ended up

calling for a revolution. The effendis who came to hear that preacher were very pleased

with that vehement sermon.[344]

Consider the change from Agent 294's dismissing language about "the wagging

tongues" of "the masses," to the seemingly more clinical, but also more anxious, "the

people of Bāb al-Shaʿriyyah are talking about politics" in this memorandum. What Agent

294 called "saying hurtful and infuriating things about the Khedive," the state now called

"talking about politics" (yataḥadathūn fī al-siyāsah), and it considered that to be a

dangerous act. It was not that the term, or the concept, of "politics" (siyāsah) was new, it

was that it acquired much more urgency and a sense of threat to public order and the

state, especially as the people who "talked politics" were not supposed to do so. Their

talk became a threat, because by now, talk could lead to disruptive action, such as a

demonstration or a strike. Indeed, the mosque preacher, whose "political sermon" is tied

in this memo to the political talk in that coffeehouse, suggested a "revolution" as a

solution to the nation's problems with its government and the British occupation.

Note that the reporting in this memo makes it seem like the conversation in the

coffeehouse and the sermon in the mosque were connected: connected by the themes of

the two speech acts, by the vicinity of the places where they happened, and by the same

people who participated in both. Once again, we see that coffeehouses were part of a

network of public places, in this case a coffeehouse and an adjacent mosque, that together

created a public sphere, a public opinion, and public action. Also of note is that although

---

[344] Ibid.

Bāb al-Shaʿriyyah was a popular neighborhood in Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, the people referred to in the memo were middle class: effendis, a former teacher in al-ʾAzhar, a mosque preacher. This corresponds to Agent 294's reports, which showed that people from those social groups used coffeehouses in that part of Cairo for their political talk. Finally, consider the degree of threat with which the state must have seen that political conversation in that coffeehouse, if it was the main feature in a memorandum signed by, or on the behalf of, the Interior Minister himself, then sent to the Palace, and probably also presented to the cabinet.

The wide range of topics discussed in that coffeehouse was also remarkable, tying together the Young Turks Revolution in Istanbul, the policies of the British-subservient Khedive, and the Press Law. Nonetheless, the staple of coffeehouse conversation usually consisted of more current political events on the national level. For example, an Interior Ministry memo from June 1910 about the General Assembly's opposition to a new governmental law targeting journalists and nationalist leaders, reported that "in the coffeehouses, one does not see anything but young people congratulating one another on the victory of the *al-ʾUmmah* [Party, but can also mean "the nation"] over the government."[345] The memo continued to explain that those young people ignored the purpose of the government with this law, congratulated ʾAbāẓah Pasha[346] for his opposition to it, and insisted that as long as foreigners were exempt from it, then so should Egyptians (waṭaniyūn).[347] Of note here are the – by now, commonplace –

---

[345] HIL 6/422, June 4, 1910.

[346] Ismail ʾAbāẓah Pasha (1854-1927), a prominent lawyer and parliamentarian, one of *al-ʾUmmah* Party's founding members.

[347] Foreign nationals were exempt from Egyptian law under the Capitulations Regime, which became a flagship issue for nationalists, but also a way to circumvent legal limitations. A major reason for the failure

association of young people with anti-government, nationalist politics, as well as the marking of coffeehouses as a place where they engage in politics.

As with the reporting of Agent 294 on the public reaction to the al-Minshāwī Affair, the lower classes deserved special attention from the state only in major events, such as the trial of al-Wardānī, the nationalist assassin of Prime Minister Ghālī. His trial and execution were obsessively covered by the nationalist press, which immediately elevated him to the status of a national hero. Al-Wardānī was explicit about the political motivation of his act, and his nationalist lawyers seemed to address the public outside the court more than the judges. Newspapers covered his daily life behind bars, including his sleeping, waking, reading, eating, drinking, and washing habits. Cartoons, pictures and drawings of al-Wardānī, along with zajals, poetry, and ballads venerating his assassination of Ghālī, filled the pages of the press.[348] A report from the Interior Ministry during the trial was specifically dedicated to the reactions of the lower classes:

> "On the issue of al-Wardānī: this issue is still the subject of conversation among people of all classes, especially the lowest class [al-ṭabaqah al-sufla]. The newspapers go a long way in keeping minds occupied [with it], as they continue to write about it, whether to ask for pardoning al-Wardānī, to criticize the *fatwa* [that opposed his execution], or to compete with each other. Unfortunately, the people of the lowest class know only what gets thrown at them, and they believe anything conveyed to them. They relish finding a subject to talk about, and they catch anything they hear. Thus, we find that the general talk [al-ḥadīth al-ʿumūmī] in their gatherings and in the popular coffeehouses [al-qahāwī al-baladiyyah] does not go beyond the topic of al-Wardānī, and showing sympathy for him… The [number of] singers specializing in his praise multiplied. They [the people] avoid policemen, and do not remember anything when confronted

---

of the 1909 Press Law to curb the radicalization of the press was that as soon as it was promulgated, many Egyptian newspaper owners fictitiously sold them to foreign nationals – Egyptians with another citizenship – in order to avoid the legal repercussions. Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 208-9.
[348] On the trial of al-Wardānī, see: Badrawi, *Political Violence*, 22-55. On the press coverage of the trial, see: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 203-4.

by them. If any information about them reaches the police, and it wants to investigate what they say, then witnesses hide from it. The following is some of the information that reached us, from which can be inferred the general feeling [al-shuʿūr al-ʿāmm] toward the al-Wardānī issue, as well as the guilelessness of the public that believes anything it hears about him."[349]

The report then goes on with a list of anecdotes about the intense emotions exhibited by people of the lower classes toward al-Wardānī. A later report, this time about his funeral, described how some of its participants (students, officers in civilian clothes, members of al-ʾAzhar, and artisans), who were sitting in the coffeehouses around al-Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque and Khayrat Street[350] after the funeral, criticized al-Wardānī's uncle for heeding the orders of the Interior Ministry and Cairo Police to keep the funeral short and peaceful.[351]

The report about al-Wardānī's trial succinctly described the reasons for the state's condescending view of the lower classes: it saw them as gullible, undiscerning, and easily manipulated, presumably by any political force. This view was surely condescending, but not entirely dismissive: by now, the potential threat of action and disruption coming from the lower classes merited a focused report, even if it was rare. Members of that class now possessed something called a "general feeling," and they "relished" talking about it, an act which needed to be monitored because it was potentially dangerous. The report even described what mechanisms generated this "talk" and "feeling": the newspapers, and popular satirists (singers), either professional or not, who sang al-Wardānī's praise. This operation took place in the *qahāwī baladiyyah*. Compare this attitude with the memo

---

[349] HIL 6/409-10, May 24, 1910.
[350] The surroundings of al-Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque were a popular, lower- to middle-class, area, although it was close to the chic neighborhoods of (today's) Downtown Cairo (formerly, ʾIsmāʿīliyyah, Bāb al-Lūq, Naṣriyyah). Khayrat Street was a much more affluent street (ʿUrābī Pasha lived on it), connecting the chic Downtown and the popular al-Sayyidah Zaynab.
[351] HIL 6/469, June 29, 1910.

about al-Wardānī's funeral: the latter focused on (mostly) the lower-middle-class, and it specified who the target groups were (students, officers, ʾAzhariyūn, and artisans). Unlike the lower class and its *qahāwī baladiyyah*, they sat around the lower-middle-class coffeehouses of al-Sayyidah Zaynab and Khayrat Street (a tier above the *qahāwī baladiyyah*). Most importantly, they were more dangerous than the chattering, emotional, lower class (they were disappointed that al-Wardānī's funeral went so quietly).

Also significant in this regard was the change from Agent 294's amorphous reference to "the masses" (*al-ʿāmmah*) to the term "the lowest class" in this Interior Ministry report. The latter term was probably translated from the English, and represented a British-inspired, class-based discourse, that was different from Agent 294's use of the older social terminology of "notables vs. masses" (al-khāṣṣah wal-ʿāmmah). Again, the language in the 1910 report was more clinical, more specific – "the lowest class" was a more limited group than "the masses" – and it echoed a specific class-based anxiety. This anxiety was probably inspired by British attitudes toward class rooted in European politics: The British – as well as other European diplomatic representatives in Egypt, particularly the Italians and the French – had been worried for years about the activity of Italian and other anarchists and socialists in Egypt, and the British-Egyptian surveillance machine targeted them closely.[352] This kind of change in terms of reference,

---

[352] Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 16. For early examples of British-Egyptian surveillance of foreign political activists, see an 1894 report from Muhammad Saʾīd Shīmī about the British commander of the secret police spreading rumors that two Italian anarchists had arrived in Cairo in order to harm the Khedive, rumors that Shīmī's investigation refuted: HIL 15/146-51, December 6, 1894. See also Agent 294 (probably, as the report is incomplete and his signature missing) complaining about the negligence of the al-Jamāliyyah neighborhood police, that did nothing about a group of Italians sitting around the coffeehouses of al-Hussein Mosque all night long, spending a lot of money: HIL 28/51-2, date missing, probably 1901. On the Anarchist movement and the foreign, mainly Italian, community in Egypt, see: Anthony Gorman, "Internationalist Thought, Local Practice: Life and Death in the Anarchist Movement in 1890s Egypt," in Booth and Gorman, *The Long 1890s in Egypt*, 222-53. For a general background on

found in secret state documents, shows how the internal discourse of the Egyptian state about social taxonomy changed in the context of colonial state building efforts, and open intellectual discourse about social issues. What the Egyptian surveillance records show us is how the Egyptian state translated British class taxonomies of society for thinking about its own security concerns, and for monitoring the potential threats to it.

Finally, note the state's policing efforts and the small acts of resistance that the people of "the lowest class" put up against them: as the "general talk" of the lowest class became a target, the police openly arrived at popular coffeehouses to investigate, monitor, and control it. In response, coffeehouse patrons either feigned ignorance, or physically hid from them.

Some coffeehouse conversations emanated to seditious conspiracies. Even Shīmī Bey, in a late report, possibly from 1904, noted that a group of young students, including one from the military academy, gathered at Coffeehouse al-Qubbah al-Khaḍrāʾ (The Green Dome), in the ʾAwqāf (Endowments) Ministry building, where one of them said that they needed to "get rid of the head first" and then achieve the rest of their goals one at a time.[353]

Especially after the assassination of Boutros Ghālī, the state came to see coffeehouses as harbors for possible conspiratorial acts. In 1912, the head of the newly founded "secret political bureau" at the Cairo Police, a Syrian-Greek called George Philippides, uncovered a conspiracy to assassinate Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, the new British Agent and Consul-General, Lord Kitchener (r. 1911-1914), and Prime Minister

foreign workers in Egypt, especially Italians and Greeks, and their role in the Egyptian labor movement at this time, see: Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 35-7, 48-82.
[353] HIL 15/509, date missing, possibly from 1904.

Muhammad Saʿīd Pasha (r. 1910-1914, 1919), which involved a few editors in *al-Liwāʾ*.
Doubts about the veracity of the accusations arose already during the publicized trial,
which eventually ended with convictions and jail terms. Later historians concluded that
Philippides entrapped the accused persons, in order to prove his new bureau to be
effective and vital. As part of this entrapment, Philippides supposedly lured, through his
secret agents and collaborators, the alleged conspirators to a meeting in a small, hidden,
coffeehouse in the then more affluent area of Shubrā, where secret agents supposedly
heard them making their assassination plans.[354] This entrapment case, which became to
be known as the "Shubrā Conspiracy," demonstrated the interest that some state officials
might have had in amplifying the political threats it faced from the nationalist movement
led by *al-Waṭanī*, in order to justify their bureaucratic existence. Inter alia, this case
demonstrated how coffeehouses became a major site for potential political threat to the
state.

Coffeehouses came to provide a space for other kinds of action as well. Heather
Sharkey noted that coffeehouses in the early twentieth century became a site for Christian
Missionaries, and their Muslim Brotherhood copycats, to preach and distribute their
proselytizing material.[355] Coffeehouses also became sites for political pamphleteering:
Agent 294 reported already in 1902 about one Muhammad Mustafa, from al-Dirāsah
neighborhood at the heart of Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo near al-Hussein Mosque, who used
to sit around the coffeehouses there, and distribute pamphlets that "he wrote with his

---

[354] Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 54-66; Badrawi, *Political Violence*, 86-94 . See also a letter to Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, whose writer was not identified, but who wrote it as friend urgently informing the Khedive about the details reported in the press on the case: HIL 49/234-9, date missing, but dated in the text to July 3 [1912].
[355] Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 107.

sinful mind" (on one particular occasion, the patrons in those coffeehouses were so upset with Mustafa's pamphlets, that they simply tore them up).[356]

Coffeehouses also became a landmark for rallies and demonstrations. An unnamed informer reported to the Khedive in January 1908 about a procession of school students planned for Accession Day (ʿĪd al-Julūs) by *al-Waṭanī*, which would set out from Coffeehouse al-Qalʿah, move through the center of Cairo, and end up in ʾAzabakiyyah Gardens. A group of high school student was supposed to wait for the procession at the New Bar Coffeehouse there.[357] As many of the rallies and demonstrations took place at ʾAzabakiyyah Gardens, the grand European-style coffeehouses there, such as New Bar, became either landmarks, or sometimes targets for protestors: a major demonstration against the Press Law in April 1909 ended up wrecking considerable damage on several places, including New Bar.[358]

Targeting New Bar and similar places can be attributed to the heightened feelings against foreigners stirred up by some nationalist speakers in those rallies: an Interior Ministry memo about one such rally that took place in ʾAzabakiyyah Gardens on November 26, 1909, with the participation of about eighty to a hundred "effendis," also recorded the lengthy speech that one nationalist activist (a former clerk in the Palace) gave. It touched on all the familiar nationalist talking points, from British and government oppression, to the need for a constitution, while giving some concrete examples. The speaker also touched on the foreigners (ʾajānib) in Egypt. He criticized them for coming into Egypt "destitute and hungry," and then gathering fortunes by

---

[356] HIL 28/148, November 16, 1902.
[357] HIL 6/25, January 3, 1908.
[358] Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 207.

establishing companies, hotels, and coffeehouses, while standing against the nationalist movement. As an example, he described how hotels owned by foreigners manipulatively discouraged *al-Waṭanī* from renting their rooms for its gatherings, saying it would not have happened if hotel owners were Egyptian.[359] Note the strong association of foreigners with coffeehouses and the hotel business in Egypt, which allegedly were veritable gold mines. Interestingly, the criticism in that speech was not directed at the loose public morals, cast in Islamic terms, that European coffeehouses, especially in ʾAzbakiyyah, purportedly brought with them. Instead, that criticism was framed in nationalist terms: foreigners monopolized the coffeehouse and hotel business (which was patently false: even New Bar was Egyptian owned by that time), and they were anti-*Waṭanī*. Given in ʾAzabakiyyah Gardens about five months before the nationalist demonstration that wrecked some damage in New Bar, such a speech might have well laid the ground for it.

Repression and Revolution

As we have seen, *al-Waṭanī*'s use of mass politics peaked during 1909 and 1910. In response, the British-controlled state apparatus moved to repress the activity of the party. Exiling its leaders, imprisoning others, increasing censorship on the press, regulating student political activities, and limiting public gatherings, all had a major dampening effect on the activity of *al-Waṭanī*. It became saddled with internal rivalries: some left it altogether; and its leaders, headed by Muhammad Farīd and Shaykh Jāwīsh, sought refuge in Istanbul (and later in Germany). The center of the party's activity once again

---

[359] HIL 6/313-4, November 28, 1909.

moved abroad, relying more on Egyptian students in Europe to run its campaigns there for Egyptian independence, while mass action inside Egypt slowly petered out. Nevertheless, the British and the Egyptian government did eventually give some ground to the popular demand for a constitution, and in 1913 promulgated a pale version of one, called the Organic Law; in 1914, a new and more powerful representative body, the Legislative Assembly, was formed. The moderate, elite, *Ummah* Party played a large part in that Assemply, while its elected vice-president, Saʿd Zaghlūl (1859-1927), a former education and justice minister, whom Lord Cromer was very fond of, now emerged as a major opposition leader.[360]

These limited concessions to public pressure proved to be short lived. As soon as, in 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War against Britain, the British severed whatever nominal ties Egypt still had with the Empire, and formally declared Egypt to be a British Protectorate. The British Agent and Consul-General now became a High Commissioner. The British deposed Khedive Abbas Ḥilmī, who was in Istanbul at the time, and put his uncle, Prince Hussein Kāmil (r. 1914-1917), in his place, with the title of Sultan, to rival the one in Istanbul. The Legislative Assembly was adjourned indefinitely, nationalists still in Egypt were detained in special camps or put under house arrest, political life was suspended, and Martial Law was established. Thousands of Britons, unfamiliar with Egypt, were brought into the Egyptian civil service, pushing more Egyptian effendis out of it, and running the country like a crown colony. Thousands of British Imperial troops, many of them Indians, and their allies from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), poured into Egypt as part of the Egyptian

---

[360] Goldschmidt, "The Egyptian Nationalist Party," 234-300.

Expeditionary Force, occupying Cairo, Alexandria, and the Suez Canal zone. More than 100,000 Egyptians were conscripted to serve in that Force; money, animals, and farm equipment were sequestered from thousands of others. By the end of the war in 1918, price inflation skyrocketed, and severe food and other shortages abounded.[361]

As part of the British military rule in Egypt, the whole Egyptian security apparatus was put under the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and as a result, the Egyptian surveillance apparatus, including the secret political bureau of George Philippides, were put under the command of the British General Staff Intelligence (the G.S.I). The G.S.I purged the Egyptian police force from Germans and Ottomans, and in 1916, even the Greek-Egyptian Philippides and his two aides (a Muslim-Egyptian and an Italian-Egyptian) were dismissed and imprisoned for taking bribes from nationalist detainees and common criminals. They were replaced by British officers.[362]

Despite the hardships, Egyptians did not stage any significant uprising against British rule during the war, so by the end of it in 1918, the latter never thought of ending the Protectorate. But the Egyptians thought of nothing else. The new Sultan (and later King) Fuʾād (r. 1917-1936) and the Prime Minister during the war, Hussein Rushdī (1863-1928), wanted more autonomy, and some *al-Waṭanī* activists were already thinking about a popular revolution. As the world was preparing for the postwar peace conference in Paris, a few leaders of the moderate and elitist ʾ*Ummah* Party, headed by Zaghlūl, suggested they form a delegation (wafd) that would put forth the Egyptian case for independence, first to the British government in London, and then to the Paris

---

[361] Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, 64-6.
[362] Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 75-81.

Conference. Since the Legislative Assembly was suspended, they went on a popular campaign that would legitimate their standing. It was a great success: more than 100,000 signatures were gathered quickly, authorizing what will be known from now as The *Wafd*, to speak on their behalf. The British refusal to heed the Egyptian popular demand to be heard was enough to ignite what will be known as *The 1919 Revolution*.

Protest erupted immediately, despite the Martial Law. The British tried to nip it in the bud by exiling Zaghlūl and three of his colleagues to Malta. This had the opposite effect: in March 1919 the Law School students went on strike, followed by judges and lawyers, high school and other students, government employees, and workers. Mass demonstrations, accompanied by mass rallies, public meetings, and fiery speeches became a daily occurrence throughout Egypt during 1919. The wide and active participation of women in this mass protest was a much celebrated development. Blowing up railroad tracks and cutting telegraph wires in the countryside considerably disrupted communications and the ability of the British to rule the country. Rioting, looting, and burning, killing British soldiers and officials, and attacking strikebreakers or collaborators also occurred.

The British responded with brute force: shooting into crowds and killing many, arresting and beating, even aerially bombing entire villages for being located near spots where railroad tracks were blown up. Nevertheless, the new British High Commissioner, General Allenby, succumbed to the popular pressure, released Zaghlūl and his colleagues from Malta in April 1919 – to mass celebrations – and allowed them to travel to the Paris Conference. There, the *Wafd* met with bitter disappointment when it was not allowed to

present its case, while even the Americans, on whom the Egyptians pinned many hopes for support, announced their recognition of the British Protectorate.

Protest resumed in Egypt in August 1919, and a British investigative mission from London, the Milner Mission, was boycotted by Egyptians. Throughout 1920 and 1921, the British tried to negotiate independence while safeguarding their interests in Egypt, alternately negotiating with Zaghlūl, with his rivals, or with various Egyptian cabinets. They accompanied negotiations with some political maneuvering, they exiled Zaghlūl again, and they continued their attempts to curb the popular protest, but all these measures ultimately failed. By 1921, it became clear that they would have to give up the Protectorate. Thus, on February 28, 1922, the British government unilaterally terminated the Protectorate and declared Egypt to be an independent sovereign state, but reserved key British interests in Egypt for future negotiations with the Egyptian government. This arrangement was buttressed by the continued presence of a British garrison in the country. Although those negotiations would take years, and despite the de facto limits on its independence, that unilateral declaration ended British direct rule in Egypt, as well as the mass protest that forced it out.[363]

---

[363] Studies on the 1919 Revolution abound. The standard narrative is still the very detailed book by participant-historian al-Rāfiʿī: Abd al-Raḥman al-Rāfiʿī, *Thawrah Sanah 1919: Taʾrīkh Miṣr al-Qawmī min Sanah 1914 ʾila Sanah 1921* [The 1919 Revolution: The National History of Egypt from 1914 to 1921], second edition, in two volumes (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1955). See also: Abd al-ʿAẓīm Ramaḍān, *Taṭawwur al-Ḥarakah al-Waṭanīyyah fī Maṣr min Sanah 1918 ʾila Sanah 1936* [The Development of the National Movement in Egypt from 1918 to 1936] (Cairo: al-Muʾassasah al-Miṣriyyah, 1968). A standard history of the *Wafd* is: Marius Deeb, *Party Politics in Egypt: The Wafd and its Rivals, 1919-1939*, St. Antony's Middle East Monographs no. 9 (London: Ithaca Press, 1979). The 1919 Revolution was also treated in broader historical works. On the Revolution and Egyptian nationalism, see: Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search of Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 40-55. On the role of women in the Revolution, see: Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 107-35. On workers and the Revolution, see: Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 83-120. Most relevant to the topic of this study is Ziad Fahmy's treatment of the Revolution and the role of

Cairo's Coffeehouses during the *1919 Revolution*

British Military Intelligence and Cairo's Coffeehouses in 1919

Cairo's coffeehouses were a major target for the British military government, which was still in place during 1919. The daily reports of the G.S.I. show how it targeted coffeehouses for close surveillance, as well as for policing: they had a regular section usually titled "Native Opinion in Cafés and Bars," which reported on conversations heard by spies, and about various activities that had taken place there.[364] It is clear that the British Military Intelligence considered coffeehouses to be a gauge for public opinion, or "the public mood." However, its primary goal was to monitor and assess political violence, such as strikes and demonstrations, in order for the military or police to quell them. This influenced the outlook of the Military Intelligence, and it did not produce a sensitive or nuanced reporting.[365] For example, it divided Egyptians to "extremists" and "moderates," but that was not according to any abstract scale of political radicalization: by "extremists," British Military Intelligence meant those who were active in strikes and

---

coffeehouses, mass media, and mass culture in it: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 243-300; see also: Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians*, 134-67.

[364] These daily G.S.I. reports were distributed to the army's general command and headquarters in Cairo, as well as to the British Residency. (See an example of a distribution list in the report from April 10, 1919. FO 141/781/6). Beyond the aggregated summary and analysis, many G.S.I. reports also included the original reports from the Egyptian police forces, in typewritten English, which were the forces responsible for the actual surveillance and intervention.

[365] British Intelligence did not anticipate the 1919 Revolution, and was ill prepared for it. Therefore, as the protest progressed, the British military established a parallel structure of "political officers," who were subordinate to regional "inspectors." These Political Officers knew Arabic and Egypt much better than the other British Intelligence officers, and produced a much more nuanced and knowledgeable analysis of the situation, including some social background to political events. They sometimes criticized the mistakes of the military administration, which were caused, so they argued, by insensitive Intelligence. Some of their reports were also included with the G.S.I. ones. See: Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 81-8.

demonstrations, supported them, or propagated them; "moderates" were the ones who advocated a return to work and to public order, and cautioned against violence.[366]

British Intelligence officers also brought with them a very British sense, and style, of class bias. They focused on the conversations, opinions, and actions of the effendiyyah: according to their action-oriented viewpoint, Egyptian society was divided into "effendis" – including students – and "the rabble."[367] While the first were the instigators of the mass protest, the latter were following them blindly. British Intelligence did follow workers' strikes closely, and it was worried, as before, about "Soviets" (i.e. workers unions and local committees) and "Bolshevism," but it attributed those to the agitation of Italian and Greek workers, as well as to some effendi nationalists.[368] Nevertheless, the British were condescending about the effendiyyah as well: one circular to Political Officers about useful propaganda called the effendis "the out of work café haunting lawyer agitator of Cairo."[369]

It is not surprising, then, that most of the British Intelligence reports focused on the major coffeehouses of the effendiyyah in Downtown Cairo and ʾAzbakiyyah, such as, but not limited to, Groppi, New Bar, Café Chicha, and Luna Park. This might also be attributed to the fact that many of its informers were British military personnel, who

---

[366] See: G.S.I. Report, April 26, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[367] An early report from the Censor's Office, which was responsible for opening private letters sent by mail, assessed the "political sentiments of native population," based on reading those letters. It divided "the agitators" to: lawyers, students, members of the Parquet (Public Prosecution), and wealthy landowners. Report of Censor's Office to the High Commissioner, December 21, 1918, FO 141/810/2. See also the subsection of an Intelligence report that was specifically titled "effendi opinion in cafés and bars:" G.S.I. Report, April 11, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[368] See for example: G.S.I. Report, April 18, 1919, FO 141/781/6; G.S.I. Report, April 25, 1919, FO 141/781/6; Police Report, July 6, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[369] G.S.I. report, April 28, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

haunted those coffeehouses as well.[370] However, al-Rāfiʿī – lawyer, journalist, later member of parliament, minister, and historian of the Revolution – corroborated the fact that the main coffeehouse hubs of the Revolution were: the old Groppi, Solet, Riche, and Bar al-Liwāʾ, in Downtown Cairo, and al-Jindī and al-Salām Coffeehouses in Opera Square (ʾAzbakiyyah).[371] There is no reason to doubt the leading role of the Downtown and ʾAzbakiyyah coffeehouses in the Revolution, but the shared focus of British military personnel and elite revolutionary leader al-Rāfiʿī might also reveal a shared class bias. It should be noted that Egyptian police, whose reports were included in the G.S.I. ones many times, did have its informers in the coffeehouses of Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo as well, and they were no less teeming with revolutionary activity.[372]

Coffeehouses As Hubs for Information: Pamphlets Replacing Newspapers

The primary function of Cairo's coffeehouses in the *1919 Revolution* was as hubs for information and debate. "In every bar," stated one Intelligence report, "are gathered groups of these young Effendis discussing, making speeches, and distributing pamphlets."[373] As before, information circulated there by way of hearsay, or print media.

---

[370] See an example of British officers reporting rumors from the Muhammad Ali Club and Turf Club: Special Intelligence Notes, April 7, 1919, FO 141/781/6. A report from the Interior Ministry on public reactions to the trial of the "Vengeance Society" (allegedly, the *Wafd*'s secret wing) was based, among other sources, on information from "Englishmen in contact with natives." Report from the public safety department in the Interior Ministry to the British Residency, October 20, 1920, FO 141/799/1.
[371] al-Rāfiʿī, *Thawrah Sanah 1919*, vol. 1, 205.
[372] Consider, for example, the G.S.I. Report from May 1, 1919: the subsection titled "Native Opinion in Cairo" gave detail about a conversation heard in Groppi; the Police Report of the same day gave information about conversations between al-ʾAzhar members heard in the coffeehouses of the old neighborhoods of al-Hussein Mosque, Bāb al-Shaʿriyyah, and Bāb al-Baḥr; while the overall G.S.I. summary also mentioned a conversation in a coffeehouse in al-Ẓāhir neighborhood of Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo. G.S.I. Report, May 1, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[373] G.S.I. Report, April 24, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

However, the use of print media in 1919 had to be adapted to the heavy censorship that the British military authorities put on any news about the mass protest, or on the activities of the *Wafd*. The very name of Zaghlūl was censored, and (licensed) newspapers ran with whole columns blanked, in an interesting act of visual protest. In order to bypass the censorship, activists took to printing what Ziad Fahmy called "illicit newspapers," that is, regular publications that were unlicensed. They usually consisted of a single broadsheet, and were rabidly anti-British; many were satirical, and also printed some *zajal*s (satirical songs).

But the principal way to bypass the British censorship was the distribution of pamphlets, circulars, and manifestos. Many circulars just printed the news of the day that were censored from the newspapers. For example, an Intelligence report from May 1919 described how the Italo-Egyptian newspaper "Roma" tried to reprint an article from "Corriere della Sera" about the British dependence on Italy in the Mediterranean: the article was censored by the British authorities in Egypt, so the editor of "Roma" got it translated into French, and distributed it in the local coffeehouses.[374] These "news pamphlets" were very quick and effective in circulating information – news received in the morning could be printed and circulated by the evening – although they could also be very inaccurate. Other pamphlets called for action, and printed dates and locations of upcoming demonstrations; some lambasted the British and their Egyptian "collaborators,"

---

[374] G.S.I. Report, May 3, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

such as strikebreakers; and still others printed revolutionary *zajal*s, that were meant to be sung, as a means to galvanize the wider public.[375]

Composing, printing, and distributing pamphlets in coffeehouses were a highly organized affair. The *Wafd* and al-ʾAzhar were the leading publishers of these revolutionary pamphlets, in addition to a significant number of independent parties, organizations, and even individuals.[376] In the *Wafd*, it was the General Secretary, Abd al-Raḥman Fahmī (1870-1946), who was responsible for organizing its information campaign, as part of organizing its overall efforts at mass politics. Writer Ahmad Amīn described in his memoirs how Fahmī entrusted him with two tasks: coordinating the speeches that party activists gave at mosques after the Friday prayers, including their contents; and writing the *Wafd*'s pamphlets, which recounted the most important news of the day.[377] As for al-ʾAzhar, British Military Intelligence focused a great deal throughout that year on the meetings, rallies, and speeches that took place there, as well as on the revolutionary activity of its faculty, students, and other members. A report from April 23rd about reactions to Allenby's order to the government employees to return to work, described how emissaries from al-ʾAzhar came down to all the coffeehouses and bars that evening, "armed with pamphlets," urging the employees to ignore Allenby's orders.[378]

---

[375] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 266-79. See a few original copies of circulars and pamphlets in FO 141/807/2. Political manifestos and pamphlets emerged as a powerful medium for anti-government discourse and action around the 1870s. Then, as in 1919, the authorities, be them Egyptian or British, saw those pamphlets and manifestos as a grave menace, and treated their writers, signers, and distributers, harshly. See: Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution*, 159.

[376] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 271-3.

[377] Amīn, *Hayātī*, 186-7. British documents surrounding the 1920 trial of Fahmī and his colleagues as the founders of the "Vengeance Society," allegedly the secret organization of the *Wafd*, confirmed that it had a special "Speeches and Circulars" sub-committee: Geoffrey Fitzgerald, Counsel for Ibrahim Abdel Hadi el-Meligui, to the General Officer Commanding, G.H.Q., October 9, 1920, FO 141/799/1.

[378] G.S.I. Report, April 23, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

One major coffeehouse even had a role in printing those revolutionary pamphlets: during the renovation of Café Riche after a 1992 earthquake, a secret basement was discovered with an old printing press that was used to print pamphlets in 1919. The Café Riche Orchestra used to play in order to cover the sound of printing, and the basement was fitted with a secret door through which the activists who were busy printing the pamphlets could escape when the police came in for inspection.[379]

Distributing the revolutionary pamphlets in Cairo's coffeehouses was also highly organized, even ritualistic.[380] "Propaganda," said one British report, "is being openly distributed now in Bars and Cafés, and the arrival of the "mail" is usually about half past six, when the crowd is at its greatest."[381] Another report continued: "The arrival of the "mail" always causes intense excitement: students and others even get up on chairs and make speeches, and usually the popular song of the moment is sung."[382] Thus, several pamphlets, manifestos, newspapers and other such publications were distributed by activists bundled together, at a certain time in the evening in order to maximize dissemination and impact. Turning coffeehouses into hubs of information and debate did not serendipitously happen: they offered the space for it for years, and revolutionary activists recognized the opportunity, seized it, and turned it into an organized operation on a much grander scale. The importance of coffeehouses as a go-to place for getting the news only grew, in view of the heavy censorship, which was aimed at blocking

---

[379] Interview with Samia Abdel Malak, member of the family that owned Café Riche: Walla Hussein, "Legendary Cairo Café Reopens," trans. Sami-Joe Abboud, *Al-Monitor*, October 26, 2015, accessed August 13, 2017, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/egypt-cairo-cafe-arab-intellectuals-reopening.html.
[380] See also: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 278-9.
[381] G.S.I. Report, April 24, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[382] G.S.I. Report, May 3, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

information and quelling the mass protest. Getting the news thus became a social ritual: coffeehouse patrons became accustomed to wait for the pamphlets to arrive, gave the whole operation a special nickname, "the mail" (al-Būsṭah, from the Italian word "Posta"), and burst into political discussions, speech-making, and even song, when it arrived.

British authorities were aware of the implications: one Intelligence report stated that the activists ("extremists") who distributed the "inflammatory pamphlets" appeared "to derive encouragement from the fact that authorities do not interfere with this."[383] The British tried to suppress this "mail" operation, raiding coffeehouses and confiscating pamphlets,[384] but the stakes were just too high for the activists to stop, so they changed their mode of operation: a later British report from May, said that a raid on the printing press of *al-Waṭanī* "had a dampening effect on extremists and on circulating propaganda. The "mail" at GROPPI's and the other principal bars is no longer distributed openly, but the "postman" delivers his pamphlets rolled up like a spill, and hands them surreptitiously only to those whom he knows."[385] Keeping the flow of information, and the galvanizing effect of political debate in coffeehouses, was paramount.

Another way to use the public space of coffeehouses was to hang proclamations and notices on their doors and walls. This practice had a long history, and the British used it as well during 1919. An Intelligence report from April related that the "Black Hand Society," a secret organization infamous for making assassination and other violent

---

[383] G.S.I. Report, May 3, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[384] al-Rāfiʿī, *Thawrah Sanah 1919*, vol. 1, 209-10.
[385] G.S.I. Report, May 5, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

threats, hung notices on the walls of coffeehouses, right next to ones from the British authorities calling all strikers to return to work. The "Black Hand Society" threatened that anyone who did return to work would be shot dead.[386] Hanging such notices on their walls activated the physical space of coffeehouses beyond passively functioning as spaces that anything could happen within them. Those notices metaphorically made the walls of coffeehouses speak, as undoubtedly the notices were read aloud and discussed by groups of people that gathered around them. Moreover, the struggle between colonial authorities and Egyptian nationalist resistance over the public sphere was reified in this way on the walls of coffeehouses, as two notices, one from each side, talked to each other over those walls.

Talking About the Revolution in Cairo's Coffeehouses

The flow of uncensored information and the political mobilization in coffeehouses only served to expand their role as loci for intense public debate. A long British Intelligence report from April, with "Notes on Opinions expressed by Members of the Various Communities in Cafés, Bars, etc.," related that "The views expressed by the effendi class on the present Ministry [a new cabinet appointed a few days earlier, headed again by Rushdī] continue in the same strain:" they would wait for the outcome of the *Wafd*'s journey to the Paris Peace Conference before deciding whether or not to support the new cabinet. Rumors even spread that attempts would be made "to do away" with the *Wafd*,

---

[386] G.S.I. Report, April 14, 1919, FO 141/781/6. See also another report from a few days earlier, saying that someone put a sign on Café Chicha's door, accusing the Syrians and Armenians of collaborating with the British. The sign was taken down by an Australian soldier: G.S.I. Report, April 9, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

"preferably on high seas." The report continued to note that groups of effendis were spotted "talking mysteriously in corners of bars and restaurants," and that "Signs are not wanting that splits are likely to occur in the near future in the Egyptian ranks. Rather heated arguments have been heard in the cafés between groups of effendis, some wanting SAAD ZAGHLUL to be Premier, some AHMED Bey LUTFI EL SAYED, and others SOUFANI Bey [Abd al-Laṭīf al-Ṣūfānī, a prominent *al-Waṭanī* politician]."[387] Thus, a British report about one evening in the life of Cairo's coffeehouses nicely tied together positions of effendis on current political affairs, exaggerated rumors, and lively political debates.

The discussions in Cairo's coffeehouses naturally followed the major events and issues during the Revolution. One topic of debate was the frequent change in cabinets, as many of the usual candidates for premiership or for a cabinet post found it difficult – even dangerous – to maneuver between the British and the popular uprising. Indeed, the British had trouble to find someone to take the post, and those who did frequently resigned. As noted above, throughout April 1919 many coffeehouse patrons discussed the new Rushdī cabinet: some effendis criticized it for collaborating with the British – especially for not resisting the conscription to the new "Labour Corps" – while others discussed their chances for getting good government positions. The cabinet's resignation later in the month did not elicit much comment in the coffeehouses, although some did speculate that Rushdī would go to Istanbul to confer with the deposed Khedive Abbas

---

[387] G.S.I. Report, April 14, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

Ḥilmī and exiled *al-Waṭanī* leaders there.[388] Criticism of a new cabinet appointed in May was widespread in Cairo's coffeehouses: al-Ṣūfānī voiced critical opinions at New Bar, a lawyer named Muhammad Bey Abu Shādī criticized it at Coffeehouse Matatia, and a young student did the same at Groppi.[389]

Of course, political criticism was not confined only to cabinet makeups: some coffeehouse patrons also criticized the *Wafd* as its efforts in Paris failed, even accusing a few of its leaders of making concessions to the British. Some rivalry between supporters of *al-Waṭanī* and of the *Wafd* was also noticed in coffeehouse debates.[390] Other major political events were also topics of intense discussions in coffeehouses, such as the boycott of the Milner Commission, which occupied patrons from May onwards,[391] or the 1920 trial of the "Vengeance Society," a secret organization of the *Wafd*, headed by its secretary, Abd al-Raḥman Fahmī.[392]

Foreign support for the independence cause was a topic of intense speculation and discussion in Cairo's coffeehouses. The American recognition of the British Protectorate over Egypt, which was announced as Zaghlūl and his *Wafd* arrived in Paris, was received with great disappointment in the coffeehouses: some speculated about the reasons for it, and others argued whether (defeated) Germany and Italy would now come to Egypt's

---

[388] See G.S.I. Reports from April 10, 11, 14, 16, 19, and 24, 1919, and a Police Report from May 1, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[389] Police Report, May 24, 1919, FO 141/781/7.
[390] G.S.I. Report, April 18, 1919, FO 141/781/6; Police Report, August 17, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[391] G.S.I. Report, May 3, and Police Reports, May 16, July 19, and August 17, 1919, FO 141/781/6; Police Reports, October 5, and 7, 1919, FO 141/781/7.
[392] See documents in FO 141/799/1, which is dedicated to the trial.

side.[393] When Italy withdrew from the Paris Peace Conference, Italians became the heroes of the moment: "Italians are therefore at present being made much of," said one British report, "and it is a common sight to see several lower class Italians joining in discussions with the natives in all the principal cafés."[394] Other patrons, especially in coffeehouses throughout Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, such as the al-Ẓāhir neighborhood, speculated about the political machinations of the deposed Khedive and his family: when his son Abd al-Qādir passed away in Istanbul, his brother and the former heir-apparent Prince Abd al-Munʿim was slated to arrive in Cairo for his funeral, which caused some to speculate that he would reconnect with the nationalists in Egypt and would lead an anti-British violent uprising. A new popular song spread through the streets, insinuating the return of the Khedive, backed by (the now defeated and ousted) Enver Pasha (1881-1922), the great military commander who led the Ottoman Empire during the War.[395] Rumors about Enver's coming to Egypt's aid against the British by mobilizing Arab-Ottoman forces popped up from time to time during 1919.[396] There were even talks about winning over the Indian troops stationed in Egypt, by appealing to Pan-Islamism and anti-British resistance: one student got up on a chair at Groppi and shouted (in French) "Vive les Indiens! Vive la revolution!" to the cheering crowd at the famous coffeehouse.[397]

Another issue discussed in coffeehouses, especially throughout April, was communal relations between Muslims and Christians. A lot was made of the close

---

[393] G.S.I. Report, April 24, 1919, FO 141/781/6; G.S.I. Report, June 2, and Police Reports, June 5, and July 2, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

[394] G.S.I. Report, April 28, 1919, FO 141/781/6. See also: G.S.I. Report, May 1, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[395] G.S.I. Report, May 1, 1919, FO 141/781/6; Police Report, July 31, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[396] Police Reports, May 12, and August 7, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[397] Police Report, April 28, 1919, FO 141/781/6. See also: G.S.I. Report, April 29, 1919, FO 141/781/6

cooperation between Muslims and Copts during the *1919 Revolution*, especially after the

tensions brought by the assassination of Butrous Ghālī.[398] However, British reports noted

that relations between Muslims and other Christians in the country, namely Armenians

and Greeks, were more complicated. Following a few street attacks on them, Armenians

and Greeks, British agents contended, were much more inclined to support British rule

for the sake of their own personal safety and that of their businesses in Egypt. At the

same time, Egyptian nationalists, fearing that such tensions and attacks would be

detrimental to their cause in Europe, tried to reassure Armenians and Greeks about their

safety.[399] The difference between Copts and other Christians stemmed from the

successful inclusion of Copts in Egyptian nationalism, both in the nationalist movement

and in the imagined national community, while some Armenians and Greeks, even if they

lived in Egypt for several generations, could be seen by nationalists as foreigners.[400]

Organizing Strikes and Protests in Coffeehouses

But the topic of conversation, and indeed action, that solicited the most intense attention

from coffeehouse patrons was the strikes, which became one of the most central mass

actions during the Revolution. These strikes included the Egyptians who still served in

---

[398] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 262-6. See also British reports, especially those about mixed gatherings and rallies in mosques and Coptic churches, or nationalist Coptic priests preaching in mosques and al-ʾAzhar shaykhs preaching in churches: G.S.I. Reports from April 6, 18, 26, May 3, 5, 17, and July 22, 1919, FO 141/781/6; G.S.I. Report, September 8, 1919, FO 141/781/7

[399] See G.S.I. Reports from March 25, April 9, 10, 13, 14, 18, and August 12, 1919, FO 141/781/6; G.S.I. Reports from April, 13-14, and 15, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

[400] The religious anxieties (and class bias) through which the British saw Egyptian nationalism was also evident in a report about a conversation heard at Groppi, where one Egyptian "native" explained that the nationalists won over the fellahin by telling them that this was a religious war against the British. G.S.I. Report, April 18, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

the state bureaucracy (the British referred to them with the French term "les employés"), high school and college students (especially Law School students) who stopped attending their schools en masse, and workers, led by the tram and railway workers.[401] British Military Intelligence watched the strikes closely, and as noted above, divided the Egyptian coffeehouse public into "extremists," who were the strikers and their supporters, and to "moderates," who wanted "normal conditions to be restored."[402] It followed their discussions in coffeehouses about the strikes,[403] which sometimes could turn violent: one debate in Café Chicha about whether to end a strike or not devolved into a broil, with chairs and ticktack boards being freely used.[404]

The "extremists" used coffeehouses as a place to call for strikes, pass instructions about them, and enforce them. Speeches and pamphlets were the usual tools of mobilization. For example, British Intelligence took note of one al-ʾAzhar shaykh making a speech in "Café Sharabash" in an old neighborhood of Cairo, calling on Egyptians to resist working for the British or joining the Labour Corps.[405] It also took note of "a young Egyptian," in the habit of distributing circulars at Groppi, who handed out a pamphlet titled "Bring Up Your Children on Freedom" that urged students and their fathers to keep the student strikes going.[406] Strike organizers spent a lot of effort, not only in organizing the strikes, but also in resisting British countermeasures: when High Commissioner Allenby issued a proclamation in late April ordering all government officials (employés) to return to work and students to their schools, activists quickly circulated pamphlets in

---

[401] On the workers' strikes, see Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 83-120.
[402] For an example of use of those terms in that sense, see: G.S.I. Report, April 26, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[403] Police Reports, April 24, and May 8, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[404] G.S.I. Report, April 26, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[405] Police Report, May 1, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[406] Police Report, May 5, and G.S.I. Report, May 6, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

coffeehouses that called for resistance to the order. It was an attempt to sway the intense debates that raged in coffeehouses and mosques about who should return to work, and under what conditions.[407]

Angry at more concrete British countermeasures, such as using Indian soldiers from the British army, or convicts, to carry out public works,[408] strike organizers promised to pay strikers for their time out of work, and raised money for that purpose nationwide and abroad. However, British Intelligence recorded some anger expressed in coffeehouses by strikers who did not get the promised reimbursements, causing some of them to accuse the strike committees of embezzlement.[409] Activists then resorted to brute intimidation, as in the case of the Black Hand Society that threatened to kill strikebreakers, something that also generated criticism.[410]

Activists also used the powerful tool of public shaming: "Apparently both the rabble and also the native women are specially hired for the purpose of accosting and insulting employés," said one report.[411] Coffeehouses, being a public place, were an obvious choice for conducting such shaming actions: one evening at Groppi, a school principal said in a loud voice that students should go back to school. "Extremists" then shouted at him, and even spat in his face in response, calling him a "traitor in the pay of the British," and cursing everybody who returned to work. It took someone to start a

---

[407] G.S.I. and Police Reports, April 23, 1919, FO 141/781/7; G.S.I. Reports, April 25, 26, and May 6, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[408] G.S.I. Reports, April 16, and 18, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[409] G.S.I. Reports, April 19, and 25, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[410] G.S.I. Reports, April 25, and 26, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[411] G.S.I. Report, April 26, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

rumor that the authorities are coming to arrest them in the coffeehouse, for the crowd to disperse "in panic."[412]

Ultimately, for a brief period of time in August 1919, coffeehouse waiters joined the new wave of strikes that erupted that month in Cairo, Alexandria, and other towns. Those strikes included the tramway and railway workers, bus drivers, bakers, cigarette and other factory workers, and shop and bank employees, among others.[413] British Intelligence reports claimed that coffeehouse waiters were encouraged to strike mainly by the nationalist effendis: "Well-dressed Effendis," said one report, were seen at Café Riche urging the waiters there to join the strike. One coffeehouse owner, Ḥamdī Bey Ṣādiq, the owner of Café Chicha and New Bar in ʾAzbakiyyah, even urged his own waiters to strike, and incited others to do the same. But he seems to had been in the minority, as a police report from August 19 indicated that the waiters returned to work, only nine days after they first began to strike, probably due to pressure from other coffeehouse owners.[414]

Thus, patrons, owners, and workers in coffeehouses involved them in one of the most significant mass actions of the *1919 Revolution*. The waiters did share the main labor grievances of other workers about pay, work hours, and the right to unionize,[415] but as Beinin and Lockman pointed out, this did not contradict the nationalistic and

---

[412] G.S.I. Report, May 3, 1919, FO 141/781/6. See also: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 260-1.

[413] On the strike wave of August 1919, see: Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 110-3.

[414] G.S.I. Report, August 10, and Police Reports, August 11, 16, and 19, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[415] A report from October 1919 said that waiters in the Continental Hotel went on strike because the owners demanded they deunionize, while they demanded a 30%-50% pay rise, and shorter working hours (some waiters worked for as long as 15 hours a day). G.S.I. Report, probably from October 21, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

revolutionary agendas that lay behind their action as well.[416] In fact, the British reports revealed that the impetus for the waiters' strike was nationalistic: it was instigated by the well-off nationalist effendis, even by the owner of two of the most important and high-end establishments in Cairo, ostensibly against his own business interests. The aim was to disrupt life in the major population centers of Egypt, so as to make it ungovernable and unlivable for the colonial authorities, thus forcing them out of the country. This underscores how essential coffeehouses became for life in Egypt, even for its colonizers. The pressure from owners on the waiters to return to work, cutting their strike short, might or might not had frustrated their goals, but it emphasized even further the importance of coffeehouses to the functioning of daily life in Egypt.

British and Egyptian Encounters in Coffeehouses

That coffeehouses such as Groppi were essential for British daily life in Cairo is evident from a number of sources. Especially during the First World War (and the second one as well), Groppi became the regular haunt for soldiers and junior brass in the British Imperial army and its allies stationed in Egypt.[417] Suffice it to note the multiple entries in the personal diaries of Irene Bonnin, an Australian army (ANZAC) nurse stationed in Cairo, which indicated her regular, almost daily, excursions for tea or ice cream at

---

[416] Beinin and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 119-20.
[417] J. R. Fiechter (ed.), *Cent Ans de Vie Suisse au Caire: Memoires et Documents* (Alexandria: Imprimerie Procaccia, 1946), 237.

Groppi, always in the company of male soldiers or civilians.[418] The fact that British and allied soldiers shared the same physical space with the revolutionary effendis complicates our understanding of how the Revolution worked on the ground, in actual urban space, and emphasizes the importance that class culture played in it. For one thing, it belies any notion of two isolated forces, physically removed from one another, only clashing on the battlegrounds of urban streets and the countryside. On the contrary, effendi revolutionaries, colonial soldiers, and colonial officials came into very close contact with each other on the urban social scene.

As we have previously seen, foreigners and Egyptians sharing the same coffeehouse space was nothing new, and it happened primarily in the high-end, European-style, coffeehouses in the new neighborhoods of Cairo. High level colonial officials and military commanders continued to meet with influential elite Egyptians in those coffeehouses, as well as in the clubs, grand hotels, and Masonic lodges, regularly conversing with them about the political situation.[419] These elite Egyptians were therefore accustomed to the close contact with British colonials, whether in government, or in social settings, and they shared their opinions on the situation with them, whether honestly or as part of a manipulative resistance. Indeed, it will be wrong to paint them simply as "collaborators," considering that the leaders of the Revolution came from the very same circles; even those elite Egyptians who were not hard revolutionaries had to

---

[418] Irene Bonnin, *Diaries of Irene Bonnin, 1915-1918*, PRG 621/21/1-2, 2014, Centenary of ANZAC 2014-2018, State Library of South Australia, http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/archivaldocs/prg/PRG621_21_1-2_Bonnin_diary_transcript.pdf (accessed August 19, 2017)

[419] Many of the British Intelligence reports relayed what British officers heard and witnessed in the high-end clubs. See, for example, a report about "the general view at Mohammed Ali Club" being that most strikers would return to work, as they could not go on without income for very long, except for those with sufficient funds, and the students, who would make most of the trouble. Intelligence report, April 23, 1919, FO 141/807/2.

maneuver between the conflicting pressures of the *Wafd* and its mass following, and those of the colonial authorities.

The encounter between groups in the mid-level hierarchy of the two sides, that is, junior British (and allied) officers or officials, on the one hand, and Egyptian effendis on the other, was sometimes more confrontational. Following Allenby's April order to return to work, and activists' call to ignore it, a student in Groppi "got up on a table and started making a speech. He was not allowed, however, to speak for long, as an Australian officer went up to him and told him that GROPPI's was not the place to make speeches. He thereupon collapsed and went away, followed by an angry crowd."[420] This is a vivid example of how disruptive the open revolutionary activity in Cairo's principal coffeehouses could be for the daily lives of mid-level colonial officials and officers. However, British Intelligence reports did not record many similar incidents, indicating that despite this clash over the control of urban space, the effendi revolutionaries and mid-level colonial officials continued to regularly share the same space, the same socio-cultural praxis, and roughly the same station on the social hierarchy. This sharing might have served only to exacerbate tensions between them, considering the class interests of the effendiyyah and the elite to replace the colonial administration in power, but it also revealed the shared milieu of political thought and social outlook between them.

---

[420] G.S.I. Report, April 23, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

British Attempts to Police Cairo's Coffeehouses

British authorities did try to police coffeehouses more forcefully, but to limited success. British soldiers and policemen raided coffeehouses from time to time, and conducted random searches on patrons for pamphlets and weapons. According to al-Rāfiʿī the usual targets were coffeehouses al-Jindī and al-Salām on Opera Square, Café Chicha, and Groppi. Al-Rāfiʿī mentioned two particularly large raids: one on March 31, 1919, when British soldiers and police inspectors rounded up "all the coffeehouses" at once, and the other on May 10 when they raided Groppi.[421] These raids had only a short term effect: "The raids on the Cafés make a certain amount of impression even if only of a temporary nature," said a British report from May 30. "Each time raids are made there is a very subdued tone amongst the frequenters of cafés and bars for several days following."[422]

The limited effect of the raids prompted the British military government to issue a general order on May 11, 1919, that forbade political gatherings in coffeehouses. According to the text of the order brought by al-Rāfiʿī, all gatherings "harmful to the regime" in bars, coffeehouses, restaurants, or places of entertainment in the Cairo Governorate were henceforth forbidden by Martial Law. A gathering "harmful to the regime" was defined as any gathering of more than five people, in which speeches were made, or any conduct occurred that could be reasonably expected to harm public safety. Any coffeehouse, bar, restaurant, or place of entertainment in which a "harmful gathering" took place was to be closed at 6pm on the first offence – remember that "the

---

[421] al-Rāfiʿī, *Thawrah Sanah 1919*, vol. 1, 209-10; vol. 2, 27-8.
[422] G.S.I. Report, May 30, 1919, FO 141/781/7. See also: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 261.

"mail" would arrive around 6:30pm when the crowd was at its greatest – and permanently closed on the second offence.[423] As has been shown above, even this measure did not succeed in significantly curbing the revolutionary activity in Cairo's coffeehouses, even if it curtailed it for a while.[424]

This is yet another strong indication of how pivotal coffeehouses were to the operations of the *1919 Revolution*, so much so that activists risked the British attempts to clamp down on their activity. The stakes for the revolutionaries were just too high to give coffeehouses up, so they were prepared to resist some pressure from authorities. For British Intelligence as well, coffeehouses were important as a gauge for the revolutionary boiling point: daily reports usually stated how "quiet" or "excited" coffeehouses were that day. The reasons given to such fluctuations of "the public mood" varied from the effects of raids, to particularly disappointing news, or exciting ones, as the case may be, to the dampening effect of Ramadan.[425]

Coffeehouses and Other Revolutionary Spaces

Coffeehouses were not the only revolutionary hubs. Mosques, Coptic churches, and high school or college campuses also served as such hubs. As noted above, Muslims and Copts gathered in each other's houses of worship, and clerics from both communities made

---

[423] al-Rāfiʿī, *Thawrah Sanah 1919*, vol. 2, 27-8.

[424] A police report from May 14 indicated that "The students and other young extremists have been deeply annoyed by the Proclamation regarding gatherings in the cafés, although they try to show their indifference to it and to boast that they have other places in which to meet." Police Report, May 14, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

[425] G.S.I. Reports, April 16, 18, 19, 24, 26, May 1, 5, and 6, and Police Reports, May 9, and 14, 1919, FO 141/781/6; G.S.I. Report, May 30, and Police Report, June 1, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

fiery speeches in them as well. Women, in particular, were present and active in mosque and church rallies, in a way they could not have been in coffeehouses.[426] Most importantly, these places operated together with coffeehouses. Note again the British report about activists from al-ʾAzhar going out to the coffeehouses "armed with pamphlets" calling to ignore British orders to end the strikes; another report described how activists gave instructions to strikers gathered in coffeehouses not to return to work, and informed them about a meeting that would take place in Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque to discuss this matter.[427] Yet another report described in the same breath speeches against strikebreakers made in a coffeehouse, in al-ʾAzhar, in a Coptic church, and in the streets of the Sayyidah Zaynab neighborhood.[428] What started as a flimsy connection between political conversations in one of Bāb al-Shaʿriyyah's coffeehouses and political Friday sermons in one of its mosques, described a decade earlier in a memo from the Egyptian Interior minister, had become a well-oiled machine of mass mobilization by 1919, in which coffeehouses, mosques, churches, and schools worked in tandem and in coordination.

Beyond revolutionary hubs, coffeehouses were also sites for demonstrations. They constituted, together with urban streets, squares, public gardens, palaces, major clubs, grand hotels, foreign embassies, and the British Residency, a selection of urban spaces used by revolutionaries for either protest, or mass jubilation. New Bar in ʾAzbakiyyah, for example, continued to be a favorite site for protesters, as it was a decade earlier: a police report from April 7, 1919, described how *al-Waṭanī* politician

---

[426] Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 263.
[427] G.S.I. Report, April 25, 1919, FO 141/781/6.
[428] Police Report, April 26, 1919, FO 141/781/6.

Abd al-Laṭīf al-Ṣūfānī drove by New Bar in his carriage at 12:15pm, and briefly addressed a crowd of demonstrators gathered in front of the coffeehouse, exclaiming "Long live the Egyptian youth who have done so much to help this movement."[429]

Finally, it seems that the revolutionary moment of 1919 eased some class barriers, epitomized in easing the exclusivity of certain high-end places. Upper class nationalists worked to mobilize lower class activists, and that necessitated places where they could meet. This allowed those activists a much greater access to places that had previously excluded them, thus creating an upward social mobility. In March, for example, nightly meetings of nationalists in Shepheard's Hotel were reported, which were hosted by a Pasha or Bey from Fayyūm, and included several other Pashas and Beys, and some 40 to 50 effendis.[430] In June, a group of Beys and effendis were spotted at New Bar, reading together the news about the troubles that the British faced in Afghanistan, and making seditious remarks about it;[431] and by August, as noted above, "well-dressed effendis" were pushing the waiters of Café Riche to go on strike. It was this kind of mobilization across the social hierarchy, made possible by coffeehouses and other public places which were operating in tandem with each other, that produced and sustained the mass protest known as the *1919 Revolution*.

---

[429] Police Report, April 7, 1919, FO 141/781/6. See also: Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 256-62.
[430] G.S.I. Report, March 25, 1919, FO 141/810/2.
[431] Police Report, June 5, 1919, FO 141/781/7.

Women and Coffeehouses during the 1919 Revolution

The *1919 Revolution* was also a culmination of some three or four decades of women's new political and social activism. As discussed in chapter 3, during that time elite women found or founded new institutions, venues, and spaces in which to engage in political and social activism, whether these were schools, infirmaries, orphanages, associations, their own homes, or even the press and publishing. The "woman question" was paramount in the political and social debates of the time, and it shaped other debates as well, especially the emerging nationalist discourse. The "new woman," as Qāsim Amīn called her, was also a nationalist icon, part and parcel of the new social groups, such as the effendiyyah, or the transformed old elites, who raised the flag of Egyptian nationalism. It was therefore inevitable that women would take part in one of the most crucial events in the history of that nationalist movement, and by doing so, elite women opened up new spaces for their activism.

As mentioned above, during 1919, women were very active in mosques and churches, where debates, speeches, and action took place. They were also instrumental in the pamphleteering activity, both in the urban centers and in the countryside, which, as we have seen, was crucial for mobilizing the revolutionary protests; and they also had an important role in collecting money to fund the revolution. Most importantly, women broke new ground for their public presence and activism when they took to the streets, and participated in the mass protests throughout 1919. The demonstration(s) of a couple or so hundreds of elite women, headed by Huda Shaʿrāwī, among others, in mid-March was one particular event that caught immense public attention at the time, and has been

mythologized since. Still veiled but on foot, which was unusual for elite women at that time, they marched through Cairo as a women-only protest, with no men. That eclipsed, however, the activism of many lower-class women, who marched with the men on several occasions, and consequently were also gunned down by British forces (in contrast, the British forces treated the demonstrations of elite women quite cautiously). Many of the lower-class women demonstrated in the older parts of Cairo, such as the al-Hussein Mosque area or Būlāq; while actresses from the theatrical troupes, and perhaps even female performers in coffeehouses, for example, paraded also through the new neighborhoods.[432]

Nevertheless, female activists still did not enter the spaces of coffeehouses directly. It is quite probable that women distributed pamphlets to men sitting in coffeehouses, as both women and coffeehouses played a crucial role in revolutionary pamphleteering. As the British Intelligence reports mentioned above suggested, women probably also accosted strikebreakers in coffeehouses. The activity of women in mosques, which, as we have seen, were linked to the revolutionary activity in coffeehouses, linked women to coffeehouses even further. Thus, women were active all around the coffeehouses, and engaged their male patrons. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 3, the physical absence of women from the heart of the coffeehouse space did not mean that their activism was not acknowledged, discussed, and lauded there. For example, Ahmad Amīn, who wrote the *Wafd*'s pamphlets during 1919 (and was also responsible for coordinating the party speeches in mosques), emphasized in his memoirs

---

[432] Badran, *Feminists*, 74-8; Fahmy, "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism," 272-3. On the famous demonstrations of elite women, and the shaping of their place in Egyptian collective memory, see: Baron, *Egypt as a Woman*, 107-34.

his writing of the news pamphlet about the women's demonstration of March 16, 1919, a pamphlet that was surely distributed all over Cairo's coffeehouses.[433] If the men going to the coffeehouses did not witness that demonstration themselves, or heard about it in some other way, they were sure to read, hear, and discuss it when they got to their coffeehouses. It will take another generation of female activists, that of the *1952 Revolution*, for them to directly sit with male activists in Cairo's coffeehouses, talk and plan a revolution, like Zaynab Diyāb in Naguib Mahfouz's famous novel about that generation and its activism, *Karnak Café*.[434]

Conclusion

Abd al-Raḥman al-Rāfiʿī, historian of the Revolution and one of its leading figures, succinctly summed up the role of coffeehouses in 1919:

> "In this period, there were known to be [certain] places in which the propagators of the Revolution, and those who discussed its issues or the issues of the country in general, used to meet. Ideas came out of there, and the general issues were studied in them. Decisions were made there, or the goals to which the [national] movement was to be directed were marked there.
>
> It is not easy to list those places, especially the secret ones, but we can mention that in their forefront were: al-ʾAzhar; Bayt al-ʾUmmah [The Nation's House, a nickname given to Zaghlūl's residence]; the old Groppi on al-Manākh Street [Queen Farīdah – Abd al-Khāliq Tharwat Street now]; Solet [Coffeehouse Ṣūlit] on Fuʾād Street; Café Riche on Sulaymān Pasha Street; al-Liwāʾ Bar; Coffeehouse al-Jindī and Coffeehouse al-Salām on Opera Square; the residence of Abd al-Raḥman Fahmī Bey in Qaṣr al-ʿAynī; the residence of ʾAmīn Bey al-Rāfiʿī in al-Ḥilmiyyah al-Jadīdah; the residence of Shaykh Muṣṭafa al-Qāyātī in al-Sukkariyyah; the residence of

---

[433] Amīn, *Ḥayātī*, 186-7.
[434] Naguib Mahfouz, *Al-Karnak* (1974), translated as: *Karnak Café*, by Roger Allen (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007).

Maḥmūd Sulaymān Pasha on al-Falakī Street; the residence of ʾIbrāhīm
Pasha Saʿīd behind Bayt al-ʿUmmah; etc."[435]

This pivotal part that coffeehouses played during the *1919 Revolution* was a
culmination of a historical process in which coffeehouses increasingly became charged
with politically significant functions. The relationship of coffeehouses with politics has a
long history, as from very early on coffeehouses in the Middle East were not only a place
for leisurely sociability, but also provided a space for men to discuss current affairs.
During some periods of time, some coffeehouses were even overtaken by politically
active groups, such as the Janissaries in Istanbul. By the turn of the twentieth century, as
we have seen in chapter 3, coffeehouses around Cairo were a meeting place for men who
had business with the government, and also for journalists who criticized it. Mostly, they
were the go-to place to catch the news, share, and debate them. The dissemination of
news and views relied on word of mouth, and on the relatively recent medium of the
newspaper.

Coffeehouses were not usually associated with one political stripe or another, thus
they were not an echo chamber for opinions of the same ilk. Rather, they were associated
with the social act of debating, either current affairs, or more generalized social, political,
and intellectual issues. In this sense, coffeehouses were functioning as 'popular
parliaments,' if we recall the original meaning of the term 'parlement' in Old French, that
is, 'speaking.' Thinking of coffeehouses as 'popular parliaments' takes on an added

---

[435] al-Rāfiʿī, *Thawrah Sanah 1919*, vol. 1, 204-5.

significance, considering the fact that the national assembly at the time was neither representative nor politically important.

As such, coffeehouses were producers of public opinion that increasingly bore down on state authorities. Examining the records of the state's surveillance machine, it is possible to trace the historical development of its interest in public opinion, which expanded down the social hierarchy. This interest grew in response to the challenges, real or imagined, that the authorities faced as a result of more people getting engaged with politics. If until the reign of Khedive Ismail, Khedival spies focused on political rivals from the ruling family itself and their supporters within a few choice families in the elite, then under Ismail they also started following the nascent press. His successor Khedive Tawfīq added the foreign community and ʿUrābī's supporters to the list of targets for his secret services; and since 1888, under British guidance, the short-lived "secret bureau" began to analyze "public opinion," by which it meant conversations between elite figures heard in ʾAzbakiyyah's Opera House and Theater.[436] By the turn of the twentieth century, veteran Khedival spy, Agent 294, expanded the scope of state interest from the very elite to include statements made by the effendiyyah in Cairo's coffeehouses, and other places. He sometimes even ventured to discuss "group(ed) opinions" of the unidentified, undifferentiated, amorphous "masses" (ʿāmmah). However condescending he was about their "wagging tongues," he did find them important enough to report. By the 1910s, the Egyptian Interior Ministry was reporting on the "general feeling" of "the lower classes." Nevertheless, it maintained the explicit view that those classes were undiscerning and gullible, only capable of following others – implicitly, their social superiors. The interest

---

[436] Bakr, *al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī*, vol. 2, 33-4.

of the state in "public opinion" seemed to had stopped at this point on the social hierarchy, and its view of the "lower classes" did not change much even during 1919: British surveillance reports continued to focus on the "public mood" of the effendiyyah, considering them to be the leaders of the credulous and impressionable "rabble."

Contrary to some assessments of the discourses produced by modern states, which argue that these discourses alone created categories of people just by naming them, *ex nihilo*, the surveillance documents examined here indicate that the Egyptian state discourse at that time reacted to changing realities – in an attempt to understand them and evaluate their risks – rather than created them. The changes to socio-political realities might be attributed to different factors, including actual measures taken by the state, but its internal discourse does not seem to have been one of them. What the surveillance documents studied here do show, however, is the class biases through which the state saw those changing realities, and how those biases shaped the very sensitive task of its political risk assessment.

The expanding list of targets for state surveillance and policing reflected the engagement of more social groups with politics, in itself a product of growing literacy, expanding bureaucracy, and burgeoning nationalism – processes that were supported by mediums such as journalism, and places such as coffeehouses. When *al-Waṭanī* successfully turned inwards, into Egypt, and into mass politics after 1904, coffeehouse "parliamentary" discussions became weaponized in a sense. They were no longer idle, harmless, chatter: they even went beyond just awakening young effendi minds into political consciousness, as Ahmad Amīn reminisced. Words now turned into actions:

crowds of effendis were discussing politics in coffeehouses and adjacent mosques in a seditious, revolutionary, manner; coffeehouse patrons of all classes were supporting the political assassin al-Wardānī; plotters were purported to be meeting in coffeehouses; political pamphlets were distributed there; and coffeehouses became sites for demonstrations.

Thus, when the time came for a popular revolution in 1919, coffeehouses were a ready-made tool for mobilizing the strikers and demonstrators, from all classes. Examining how activists used coffeehouses during the Revolution reveals the machinery behind the mobilization of mass action in an urban space – it did not just happen serendipitously. Coffeehouses were the place in which the Revolution was discussed and strategized, where decisions were made, and where information about the general situation, as well as particular strikes and protests, was routinely circulated. Coffeehouses were the place where activists wrote, printed, and distributed pamphlets, and where they made speeches calling for action. Coffeehouses were so essential to mass activism during the *1919 Revolution*, that British attempts to police and curb their activity had only limited effect.

Coffeehouses did not operate alone in this mass mobilization. In the previous chapter, I tried to map coffeehouses across Cairo, and locate them on a spatial-social grid: I showed how middle- and lower-class coffeehouses worked together with adjacent bars and barbershops on the same level, and how these were in turn connected to elite majālis and clubs/lodges. By 1919, these connections remained, as we can learn from al-Rāfiʿī's description of coffeehouses and private residences of revolutionary leaders forming

together what he called "the meeting places of the Revolution." But by that time, new connections across city spaces were made, especially between coffeehouses and adjacent mosques, which operated together in mobilizing mass protest. It was this dynamic network of urban public spaces that formed an actual, not theorized, public sphere.

The need to work together through this network of places somewhat eased its class barriers. Pashas and Beys were spotted together with effendis in ʾAzbakiyyah's coffeehouses, in grand hotels, in clubs, and undoubtedly also in the former's residences; and "well-dressed effendis" were spotted encouraging coffeehouse workers to strike. This might have contributed to some upward social mobility, especially for the effendiyyah. This particular class of people, engrossed by nationalism, anti-colonialism, and constitutionalism, was the veritable engine of the *1919 Revolution*. Since the new coffeehouses of Downtown Cairo, as well as the older ones in ʾAzbakiyyah and Mamluk-Ottoman Cairo, were its crucible, it helps to further explain how those coffeehouses became indispensable for the workings of the Revolution.

Conclusion

"The café plays a big role in my novels and, more importantly, in all of our lives… For me, cafés are an endless source of memories, all of them dear to me, for they are linked to friends, and youth, and the best days of my life." This is what Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who might as well be dubbed "the poet of Cairo's coffeehouses," intimated to his protégé and companion, the writer Gamal al-Ghitani.[437] This study is an attempt to construct a history of Cairo's coffeehouses that can help explain how they became such a fundamental part of the intimate mindscape of a quintessential Cairene like Mahfouz. The first two chapters traced their *longue durée* urban and social history from the eve of the Ottoman conquest of Cairo to the first decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 3 discussed how they helped to create a political public sphere, and how they functioned in it, together with other places that were part of it; while chapter 4 explored their role in galvanizing and mobilizing particular social groups to act in mass protest. Continuing this history into the mid-twentieth century would do well to consider how Cairo's coffeehouses became hubs for politicized writers and public intellectuals. Mahfouz

---

[437] Gamal al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, trans. Humphrey Davis (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 125-6.

should play an important part in such a history, as the one who had done the most to propagate that view of his beloved city's coffeehouses.

Central to the development of Cairo's coffeehouses were class and sociability. Coffee-drinking was a social habit that started with poor social groups: Sufis, soldiers, students, and nomads (Bedouins), among others. It spread "from the bottom up" the socio-economic hierarchy, but while the richer classes could, and did, enjoy coffee at their own houses – their usual social setting – the poorer had to establish their own houses for coffee. Most usually opened in public, rather than strictly residential, parts of town, where the traffic of people and goods was significant and free, coffeehouses offered the poorer classes an opportunity for respectable, non-religious, everyday sociability, that did not exist for them before. For the poorest of the poor, coffeehouses offered limited nourishment in the form of coffee beans and biscuits, while coffee was both a stimulant for a day of physical labor, and a hunger suppressant in a situation of food scarcity. Coffeehouses continued to fulfil the same function well into the twentieth century.

Thus, in terms of opulence and high social value, what was true for coffeehouses in Istanbul, Damascus, or Aleppo, was not necessarily true for coffeehouses in Cairo, perhaps contrary to expectation. Cairo's coffeehouses remained until the mid-nineteenth century rather small in size and modest in decor. That does not mean that there were no better and bigger coffeehouses than others. The better ones usually served a class of artisans and small merchants that were only slightly more comfortable financially than the poor working class. In any case, the great success of coffeehouses rested on their ability to offer the comforting regularity of routine sociability, which strengthened social

bonds among the lower classes, while also offering a very important locus for the development of popular entertainment and leisure practices.

The class dynamics surrounding Cairo's coffeehouses are also key for understanding their gender dynamics. The common approach expressed by the aphorism that "coffeehouses were/are a male space" is a rather blinkered approach that ignores the spatial and social contexts in which coffeehouses operated. That most patrons of coffeehouses were men was largely true, but this study offers a few correctives, and frames of reference, to that fact. For one thing, women occasionally entered the space of coffeehouses, especially as that space usually invaded the unsegregated streets and markets. They might have done so under special circumstances, and their presence inside the coffeehouse might have been disruptive, but coffeehouses were never an entirely "woman-free" space, if such space ever existed at all. Moreover, there were female *qahwajiyyah*-s, very rare perhaps, but they existed nonetheless. Many more women owned the property that was rented as, or for, coffeehouses, whether they dealt with the renters directly, or through a male agent. By the 1870s, foreign women who socialized with men in the new, "European"-style coffeehouses, were slowly changing norms of mix-gendered socializing in public. By the 1930s, *Groppi* employed young women to take orders by phone, and work in the shop.[438]

In terms of spatial context, the fact that coffeehouse-space spilled over into the street (something that authorities always tried to control, with very little success), not only brought their male patrons in close contact with women who happened to pass by, but also created a kind of open space in which female dancers and singers (as well as

---

[438] Interview with Franco Groppi, Geneva, January 25, 2016.

crossdressing young males) used to perform for the entertainment of the men sitting in the coffeehouse. Nominally, women might have been outside the coffeehouse, but in actuality, their performance for the male patrons of a certain coffeehouse expanded its virtual space to include those (performing) women in it as well, albeit in a very specific function.

We also need to consider the dialectics of coffeehouses with other spaces where coffee was consumed, spaces which were not gender-segregated, or were so only temporarily: homes, festivities, and bathhouses ("the woman's coffee-house," according to Lady Montagu). Coffee and its paraphernalia (like the waterpipe, and other cultural practices) linked those different places, some private and some public, and news traveled between them. In this string of inter-connected places, coffeehouses were nearly the only place where men predominated: it was not, therefore, obvious or "natural," and it had to be maintained. Inasmuch as social habits of gender-segregating spaces were upper-class habits – habits like confining elite women to harems, or having them veil – and inasmuch as coffeehouses were a lower-class social institution, then coffeehouses offered lower-class men the opportunity to replicate those upper-class practices of gender segregation where they did not exist before.

Even these habits of gender-segregating public spaces changed during the latter half of the nineteenth century, along with other fundamental changes in Cairo's coffeehouse scene, as well as in Cairo generally. The significant expansion of the city, both in terms of built area and in terms of population growth, brought with it new kinds of coffeehouses, that were used by new kinds of social groups. The Mediterranean styles of the new coffeehouses – in look, layout, foodways, and entertainment – dubbed in

Egypt as "European," were brought over by Mediterranean immigrants (mostly Greeks, Italians, and French). These working-class immigrants were not themselves part of the British colonial machine. They did not open their coffeehouses as part of some sort of "colonial logic," although they did profit from privileges, economic and legal, that the colonial situation in Egypt allowed. Moreover, the urban growth that the new coffeehouses were part of, was initiated by Egyptian rulers who chose to adapt French and Italian models before British colonization, motivated as they were by a will to project power onto Europe, around the Mediterranean, in the Ottoman empire, and to Egyptians.

Furthermore, by the turn of the twentieth century, the new coffeehouses were patronized not only, not even mainly, by those "foreigners," whomever they were: tourists, colonial administrators and officers, expatriates, immigrants from both sides of the Mediterranean, or Westernized Egyptians. The new coffeehouses were also a special favorite of an emerging social group within the Egyptian urban middle class, namely the effendiyyah. The effendis were defined more by their lifestyle than by any socio-economic or professional category, a lifestyle that they modeled after what they saw as the "modern" lifestyle of the global – read: European – middle class. That modern lifestyle hinged on fashion, social and cultural habits, consumerism, education, urbanism, and social mobility (from rural to urban, from low to middle class). Therefore, one's inclusion in that new, modern, social group, which until the 1930s held the promise of better prospects in life, hinged on outward social symbolism, which had to be seen in public. Thus, the new coffeehouses became a crucial space for the effendis to perform their group identity. No wonder then, that within decades during the latter half of the nineteenth century, the numbers of new coffeehouses in the new neighborhoods of Cairo,

where most effendis settled, surpassed the numbers of the old coffeehouses in the older parts of town.

The new coffeehouses, however, did not exactly push the old ones aside: the old ones have always served the urban lower or lower-middle classes, while the new coffeehouses served the new urban social group of the effendiyyah. The effendis were working to define themselves in contradistinction to those below them on the urban social scale (from which most of them came), and in contradistinction to those above them, whom they challenged for social, political, and economic power. Therefore, it was imperative for the effendis to differentiate between "their" coffeehouses and the ones of the urban working classes, by mainly avoiding being seen in the latter.

At the same time, the social figure of *Ibn al-Balad* was developing, to a large extent in response to the effendis and the "foreigners" (*khawājah*-s). This figure epitomized the lower-class, urban, predominantly Muslim, Cairenes, and thus their coffeehouses, which the effendis were keen to avoid, became the *qahāwī baladiyyah*. These coffeehouses continued to serve as a pivotal place for that urban poor working class, which was growing due to an influx of poor immigrants from the countryside. The *qahāwī baladiyyah* offered them a place to socialize, network, and support one another in terms of food, or finding work and shelter, in a new and challenging mega-city. Finally, the upper class of Egyptians, for its part, still largely avoided coffeehouses, and found itself other, new, places to socialize in, beyond their own mansions: exclusive clubs, Masonic lodges, and grand hotels.

The historical dynamics are also important here. If in the 1870s effendis frequented the coffeehouses in ʾAzbakiyyah, then by the 1890s they also filled the coffeehouses in the old neighborhoods, especially around the al-Hussein Mosque. The 1890s saw the biggest surge in population, and the biggest building spree in Cairo. The ranks of the effendiyyah also grew significantly, as professionals, especially lawyers, and intellectuals joined that group, in addition to the state employees and bureaucrats. As more employment opportunities in the bureaucracy and the army were blocked by the British colonial regime that brought in more British and European personnel to fill in their upper ranks, the effendis grew poorer, and stayed in the older neighborhoods. Therefore, already by the 1890s the exclusive link between effendi coffeehouses and ʾAzbakiyyah was disturbed: although effendis continued to patronize the coffeehouses there, and from the 1900s onwards also those in the developing ʾIsmāʿīliyyah (*Wusṭ al-Balad*) neighborhoods (Bāb al-Lūq, Naṣriyyah), they also frequented the coffeehouses in the old neighborhoods.

Moreover, with time, the styles introduced by the new coffeehouses influenced the older ones as well: the *maṣṭabah*-s made way to tables and chairs, they started serving tea and other drinks besides coffee, and the *ḥakawātī* made way to the gramophone and the radio. The waterpipe and board games, however, made the other way around, and spread to the new coffeehouses as well. In short, the mutual influence between new and old coffeehouses, and the same social groups, especially the effendiyyah, that frequented the coffeehouses in both the new and old neighborhoods, both undermine the dichotomic view of Cairo as a "dual city," divided between a "European" and an "Oriental" cities.

However, not every novelty that the new coffeehouses introduced was just as welcome. This was especially true for the ever growing presence of women and alcohol in certain new coffeehouses. European ladies, whether tourists or expatriates, socialized with men in some of the new coffeehouses that introduced the new categories of *cafés-dansants* and *cafés-chantants* (ball-rooms and cabarets, respectively) to the scene in Cairo. Some local Egyptian women, Copts and Muslims alike, soon followed suit, and even opened, managed, and worked in such coffeehouses. Thus, female entertainers were brought from outside the coffeehouses into them, and were given a stage. However, this development was so associated with prostitution, that it attracted much criticism. Middle class men protested what they perceived as over-sexualized presence of women in public, as well as the proliferation of alcohol in the new coffeehouses, criticizing them as harmful to society and the state. The criticism did not hurt the popularity of the new coffeehouses with middle class men, but respectable elite women, like Huda Shaʿrāwī, stayed clear of coffeehouses altogether.

The new coffeehouses were crucial for the formation of the effendiyyah not only in terms of networking and the performance of social identity and distinction, but also in terms of shaping their political consciousness, and their political activism. As this group became more politically involved in protest against British colonial rule, as well as against a political system that restricted their socio-economic and political opportunities, Cairo's coffeehouses became a crucible for their political awareness. Activists engaged in avid consumption of politically and intellectually oriented newspapers and other publications, which were read aloud and debated in groups sitting in coffeehouses. Thus, political debate developed as a veritable social habit in coffeehouses. Examining the

reports of a Khedival spy from 1901-2, who monitored the coffeehouses on the border between Cairo's old and new neighborhoods, as well as upper class homes, salons and clubs, shows how these places were connected to each other. The channels that connected them were those newspapers, which were discussed in all those kinds of spaces, as well as the people who could move between those otherwise socially distinct places. Networked in this way, coffeehouses and upper-class salons and clubs formed a politically charged public sphere by the turn of the twentieth century, one that earned the attention of the state.

Quasi-secret surveillance of conversations in Cairo's coffeehouses by the spies of various rulers was a phenomenon attested to as early as the 1830s: a phenomenon that coffeehouse patrons were well aware of, and largely ignored. Surveillance did very little to stamp out political conversations and activism in coffeehouses, and therefore it was not very useful as a measure of control, as much as a measure of monitoring. Kırlı in his study of surveillance in 1830s Istanbul's coffeehouses theorized them as contested public space between state and public. In Cairo's case, the monitoring measures of the Egyptian state, and even the harder policing measures taken by the British military regime in 1919, because of their very limited success, hardly amounted to a real contest over the public space of coffeehouses. Nevertheless, the position of the patrons of many coffeehouses, namely the effendis who were civil servants and junior officers, vis-à-vis the state, must have been complex. On the one hand, they served that state, but on the other, they used their coffeehouses to develop a critique of that state, whether of British colonial rule, or of the Egyptian upper-class that kept them out of power. In this sense, of coffeehouses

being one of several urban spaces that developed a counter-balance to the ruling elite, Habermas' model of the public sphere does work.

Building on this basis, Cairo's coffeehouses came to play a leading role in the turn of the Egyptian nationalist movement to mass politics after 1907, culminating in the *1919 Revolution*. Participant-historian al-Rāfiʿī described them as a kind of headquarters for the 1919 revolutionaries: they became hubs for information, debate, decision-making, and mobilization. That process started when the nascent Egyptian nationalist movement, led by the *al-Waṭanī* party and heavily reliant on the effendiyyah and on some workers' unions, sought to mobilize them for mass protest. *Al-Waṭanī* used its schools, colleges, and clubs, as well as mosques, unions, and of course, coffeehouses, for that purpose. Thus, new connections developed between coffeehouses and other spaces where public opinion and action were shaped: coffeehouses were already connected to debates in private *majālis* (salons) and clubs of the upper-class, and now new connections were made. Of course, the state's surveillance machine took notice, and for the first time considered the political discourse in the *qahāwī baladiyyah* as well: if in the past, monitoring them was more of a public order issue, now the state's assessment of the political risk involved in the talk of the *ʿāmmah*, or the "lowest-classes," in their coffeehouses, changed.

During 1919, prominent new coffeehouses such as Groppi became a meeting place for revolutionary leaders, in addition to their own homes; activists climbed on chairs and tables and made speeches; instructions for protests and strikes circulated in coffeehouses; and pamphlets, that replaced the heavily censored newspapers, were printed and regularly distributed there. The British army tried to limit gatherings and

pamphleteering in coffeehouses, and even raided them several times, but again, failed to significantly curb the revolutionary activity in them. The role of coffeehouses in the *1919 Revolution* reveals, then, the organized efforts that went into the mobilization of mass protest in a moment of political crisis. "The masses" did not just magically appear on the streets. Exaggerating the organizational prowess of some political party or another also does not provide a sufficient explanation. The use of informal social networks that made up the political public sphere, such as coffeehouses in 1919, complete such explanations.

The *1919 Revolution* was also a high point in the participation of women in public politics. Since the last decades of the nineteenth century elite and upper-middle-class women found new avenues for political and social activism. They debated their changing roles in the family, in society, and in the creation of the Egyptian nation. They did so through writing in newspapers, journals, and other publications, as well as through the *majālis* (salons) that they organized in their homes. Women also got involved in expanding education across gender, and in opening such social welfare institutions as hospitals and orphanages. In 1919, demonstrations of elite women, which constituted a very rare and dramatic move on their part into public space, gained mythical status in Egyptian public memory, although lower-class women also participated in demonstrations, and alongside men, and were even killed by the British army, alongside male demonstrators.

Elite women, however, still avoided coffeehouses. Although European women, expatriates or tourists, socialized with men in coffeehouses, and some middle and lower class Egyptian women did the same, the presence of women in coffeehouses was still so associated with prostitution, sexual promiscuity, and entertainment, that socially and

politically active elite women, like Huda Shaʿrāwī, did not set foot in coffeehouses. Nevertheless, the changing role of women in society and in "mothering" the nation was a topic of conversation for men in their coffeehouses, news that were discussed in elite women's *majālis* in the morning were discussed by middle-class men in coffeehouses in the afternoon, the news about the "women's demonstration" in 1919 were circulated in coffeehouses, and women did distribute pamphlets in coffeehouses during the revolution. Once again, this evidence shows how the gendered dialectic between coffeehouses and other spaces worked at that time. It will take another generation, the generation of the *1952 Revolution*, for young female activists to sit with men inside coffeehouses and talk about a revolution, like Zaynab in Naguib Mahfouz's famous novel *Karnak Café*.

In sum, this study calls attention to the question of the place of *place* in history. Following a wide consensus of scholars, from geographers to literary critics, I too understand *place* as a non-neutral space, a space inflected, shaped, and rendered intelligible by the activity of humans in it. But how so? If anything, this study shows how the history of Cairo's coffeehouses can shed light on some of the more important questions in Egyptian historiography and beyond. It highlights the fundamental importance of class and social hierarchy to several kinds of historical developments and frames of reference. Coffee and coffeehouses started as a social drink and a social institution for the lower-classes, and spread from the bottom up the social hierarchy, in contradistinction to their historical itinerary in Europe, or to Bourdieu's postulations about cultural tastes being determined only by the upper-classes.[439] New kinds of coffeehouses entered the scene in the latter half of the nineteenth century and catered for

---

[439] Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979).

certain tourist and immigrant populations, as well as to a new Egyptian social group that was shaping at the same time, in part through coffeehouses.

Although this new group, the effendiyyah, used the new coffeehouse culture to distinguish itself from the other social groups, it did not suppress the existing one. Inasmuch as the new coffeehouse culture was seen as "European," this was a socio-cultural construction made in Egypt; and so was the designation of existing coffeehouse culture as "local" (*baladī*). Moreover, with the influx of lower-class immigrants from the Mediterranean, the brand "European" did not fully correspond, in actuality, to neat socio-economic categorizations that equated it with "high-class." As Will Hanley showed, not every European immigrant was always, and in any given situation, in a position of power over locals. Mutual influences that developed with time between the two coffeehouse cultures also belied – to a certain extent – the attempts at distinguishing them, as well as the attempts at distinguishing between two parts of Cairo. Whatever the adaptation from Mediterranean and European culture was, it was initiated by the Egyptian elite, and later by the middle class, in order to project and obtain power by joining it. Thus, nothing in the historical trajectory of Cairo's coffeehouse scene suggests a connection to British colonialism: if anything, the same coffeehouses in Cairo that the Egyptian effendis shared with colonial soldiers (like Groppi) were eventually used by the former to mount an anti-colonial campaign.

Class was also crucial for the early gendering of coffeehouse space, as well as for the challenging changes in that respect during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coffeehouses were also crucial for the development of certain class-based forms of entertainment and leisure practices. Finally, social hierarchy was also important

in the contribution of Cairo's coffeehouses to the development of the public sphere in Egypt, and to mass politics. In this regard, it is imperative to see the connections between coffeehouses and other spaces, some public and some private, and how these connections networked them to produce the public sphere, whether the political one, the social one, or the cultural one.

As many social and cultural historians, taking a cue from Pierre Nora,[440] are searching for "sites" to investigate, some of them theorized and virtual "sites," such as print media, coffeehouses are an example for an actual, physical, site, whose importance to anything from class, gender, social identity, culture, politics, and the public sphere, this study tried to highlight.

---

[440] Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris : Gallimard, 1984).

Bibliography

Archival Materials (Textual)

Abbas Hilmi II Papers, Special Collections, Durham University

HIL 6.

HIL 15.

HIL 16.

HIL 28.

HIL 49.

The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom

FO 141/781/6.

FO 141/781/7.

FO 141/799/1.

FO 141/807/2.

FO 141/810/2.

Visual Materials and Maps

Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Gezira Club Website, http://geziraclub.club/

Library of Congress.

Max Karkegi Collection, Boîte VZ-1246 (10), Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Max Karkegi Collections, L'Egypte d'Antan Website,
http://www.egyptedantan.com/egypt.htm

MFQ 1/1379/59, The [British] National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division, The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Census Data

Maṣr, Maṣlaḥah ʿUmūm al-ʾIḥṣāʿ. *Taʿdād Sukkān al-Quṭr al-Miṣrī li-Sanah 1917* [Census of Egypt 1917]. Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-ʾAmīriyyah, 1920-1921.

Meta-data from the 1848 and 1868 Egyptian Censuses, Egyptian National Archives. Courtesy of Mohamed Saleh's digitization project.

Descriptions and Surveys of Cairo

Al-Ghīṭānī, Jamāl. *Malāmiḥ al-Qāhirah fī 1000 Sanah* [The Features of Cairo during 1000 Years]. Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1983.

Description de l'Égypte: État moderne, vol. 18. 2nd edition. Paris: Panckoucke, 1829:

> De Chabrol. "Essai sur les moeurs des habitants modernes de l'Égypte" in *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Panckoucke, 1826), vol. 18, bk. 1.

> Jomard. "Description de la ville et de la citadelle du Kaire" in *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Panckoucke, 1829), vol. 18, bk. 2.

Lane, Edward William. *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. London: Nattali and Bond, [1836].

Mubārak, ʿAlī. *Al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyyah al-Jadīdah li-Maṣr al-Qāhirah wa-Mudunihā wa-Bilādihā al-Qadīmah wal-Shahīrah* [Tawfīq's New Plans for Cairo and its Ancient and Famous Towns and Environs]. 1st edition. Būlāq, Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kubra al-ʾAmīriyyah, 1888.

Tietze, Andreas. *Muṣṭafā ʿĀlī's Description of Cairo of 1599: Text, Transliteration, Translation, Notes*. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien, 1975.

Guides, Travel Accounts

De Nerval, Gérard. *Voyage en orient*. 3rd edition. Paris: Charpentier, 1851.

Kemeid, Hallil J. *Cairo and Egypt: Life in the Land of the Pharaohs*. 2nd edition. London: Simpkin, Marshall Ltd., 1898-9.

Levernay, François. *Guide-Annuaire d'Égypte, Année 1872-1873*. Cairo: Typographie Française Delbos-Demouret, n.d.

Plunkett, G. T. *Walks in Cairo: A Guide to the Most Picturesque Streets and Buildings in the Capital of Egypt*. 2nd edition. London: Richardson & Co., 1889.

Memoirs, Diaries

Al-Ghitani, Gamal. *The Mahfouz Dialogs*. Humphrey Davis, trans. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.

Al-Ṭūkhī, Abdallah. *ʿAynān ʿala al-Ṭarīq* [Eyes on the Road]. Cairo: GEBO, 2002.

ʾAmīn, ʾAḥmad. *Ḥayātī* [My Life]. 1st edition. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1969.

Bonnin, Irene. *Diaries of Irene Bonnin, 1915-1918*, PRG 621/21/1-2, 2014, Centenary of ANZAC 2014-2018, State Library of South Australia, http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/archivaldocs/prg/PRG621_21_1-2_Bonnin_diary_transcript.pdf

Fiechter, J. R. *Cent ans de vie Suisse au Caire: Mémoires et documents*. Alexandria: Imprimerie Procaccia, 1946.

Montagu, Mary Wortley. *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady M-y W-y M-e*. A new edition. London: Printed for T. Cadell [etc.], 1784.

Russell, Thomas. *Egyptian Service: 1902-1946*. London: John Murray, 1949.

Shaʿrāwī, Huda. *Mudhakirāt Huda Shaʿrāwī* [Memoirs of Huda Shaʿrāwī]. Electronic reproduction. Cairo: Kutub ʿArabiyyah, 2007.

Uzon, Maurice. "Memories from the Nile Country" [in Hebrew], *Bney Hayeor: A Journal for the Heritage of Egyptian Jewry* 2 (2006): 13-4.

Treatises

Al-Muwayliḥī, Muhammad. *Ḥadith ʿĪsa ʾibn Hishām*, translated as *A Period of Time*. Roger Allen, trans. Reading, U.K.: Middle East Centre, 1992.

Blunt, Wilfrid Scawen. *Atrocities of Justice under British Rule in Egypt*. 2nd edition with a new preface. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907.

Brookes, Douglas S. (trans.). *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Âli's:* Mevāʾidün-Nefāʾis Fī Ḳavaʿidiʾl-Mecālis*: "Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings"*. Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures 59. Harvard: The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University, 2003.

Thomas, Lewis V. *A Study of Naima*. Norman Itzkowitz, ed. New York: New York University Press, 1972.

ʿUmar, Muhammad. *Ḥāḍir al-Miṣriyyīn ʾaw Sirr al-Taʾakhkhurihim* [The Present of Egyptians, or the Secret of their Backwardness]. Majdī Abd al-Ḥāfiẓ, ed. Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Miṣrī li-Tawzīʿ al-Maṭbuʿāt, 1998.

Interviews

Interview with Felix Cohen, Tel Aviv, December 10, 2015.

Interview with Franco Groppi, Geneva, January 25, 2016.

Interview with Levana Zamir, Tel Aviv, November 8, 2015.

Interview with Maurice Uzon, Tel Aviv, November 15, 2015.

Interview with Moshe Khalaf, Tel Aviv, October 23, 2015.

Interview with Shimʿon Tamir, Tel Aviv, November 15, 2015.

Interview with Yosef Dabi, Tel Aviv, November 2, 2015.

Newspapers, Journals, Periodicals

Al-ʾAhrām

Al-Monitor

Al-Muṣawwar

Al-Nadīm

Al-ʾUstādh

Le Programme: Journal quotidien contenant les spectacles des théâtres de son altesse le khedive

L'Imparziale

Rigoletto: giornale artistico teatrale

Project Jaraʾid: A Chronology of Nineteenth-Century Periodicals in Arabic (1800-1900), Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO), https://www.zmo.de/jaraid/index.html.

Literature, Theater

ʾIsmāʿīl, Sayyid ʿAlī. *Masraḥ ʿAlī al-Kassār* [The Theater of ʿAlī al-Kassār]. Cairo: Ministry of Culture, National Center for Drama, Music and the Folkloric Arts, 2006.

Mahfouz, Naguib. *Al-Karnak* (1974), translated as: *Karnak Café*. Roger Allen, trans. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007.

Mahfouz, Naguib. *Zuqāq al-Midaq* (1947), translated as: *Midaq Alley, Cairo*. Trevor Le Gassick, trans. Beirut: Khayats, 1966.

Books, Articles, Chapters, and Theses

Abd al-Ḥalīm, ʿĪd. *Ḥikāyah Maqāhī al-Ṣafwah wal-Kharāfīsh* [The Story of the Coffeehouses of the Elites and the Good-for-Nothings]. Cairo: Wizārah al-Thaqāfah, Al-Hayʾah al-ʿĀmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 2014.

Abd al-Ḥamīd, Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad. *Al-Maqāhī fī Taʾrīkh al-ʾAdab* [Coffeehouses in Literary History]. Cairo: Dār al-ʿUlūm lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2009.

Abd al-Wāḥid, Muḥammad. *Ḥarāʾiq al-Kalām fī Maqāhī al-Qāhirah* [Incendiary Talk about Cairo's Coffeehouses]. Cairo: ʾAṭlas lil-Nashr wal-ʾIntāj al-ʾIʿlāmī, 2003.

Abu-Lughod, Janet. *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

Ahmed, Heba Farouk. "Nineteenth-Century Cairo: A Dual City?," in Nezar AlSayyad, Irene Bierman, and Nasser Rabbat (eds.), *Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 143-72.

Aktepe, Münir. *Patrona Isyani, 1730.* Istanbul : Edebiyat Fakültesi Basimevi, 1958.

Al-Bayātī, Shawkat Abd al-Karīm. *Taṭawwur Fann al-Ḥakawātī fī al-Turāth al-ʿArabī wa-Ātharuhu fī al-Maṣraḥ al-ʿArabī al-Muʿāṣir* [The Development of the Art of the Story-teller in the Arabic Tradition and its Influence on the Contemporary Arab Theater]. Baghdad: Wizārah al-Thaqāfah wal-ʾIʿlām, Dār al-Shuʾūn al-Thaqāfīyyah al-ʿĀmmah "Āfāq ʿArabīyyah", 1989.

Al-Dhawādī, Rashīd. *Maqāhī al-ʾUdabāʾ fī al-Waṭan al-ʿArabī* [The Coffeehouses of the Literati in the Arab Homeland]. Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Maṣriyyah al-ʿāmmah lil-Kitāb, 1999.

Al-Dhawādī, Rashīd. *Maqāhī Najīb Maḥfūẓ fī Marfaʾ al-Dhākirah!* [Naguib Mahfouz's Coffeehouses in the Harbor of Memory!]. Cairo: Maktabah Madbūlī, 2008.

ʿAlī, ʿArafah ʿAbduh. *Al-Qāhirah fī ʿAṣr ʾIsmāʿīl* [Cairo during Ismail's Times]. Cairo: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1998.

Al-Jumayʿī, ʿAbd al-Munʿim ʾIbrāhīm. *Al-Khidīwī ʾIsmāʿīl wa-Bināʾ al-Qāhirah al-Ḥadīthah: Mashrūʿ Bārīs al-Sharq* [Khedive Ismail and the Building of Modern Cairo: The Paris of the East Project]. N.P., 2001.

Al-Jundī, Anwar. *Taṭawwur al-Ṣaḥāfah al-ʿArabiyya Fī Maṣr* [The Development of the Arabic Press in Egypt]. Maṭbaʿah al-Risālah, 1967.

Alleaume, Ghislaine and Philippe Fargues. "La naissance d'une statistique d'État: Le recensement de 1848 en Egypte," *Histoire & Mesure* 13/1-2 (1998): 147-93.

Al-Rāfiʿī, Abd al-Raḥman. *Thawrah Sanah 1919: Taʾrīkh Miṣr al-Qawmī min Sanah 1914 ʾila Sanah 1921* [The 1919 Revolution: The National History of Egypt from 1914 to 1921]. 2nd edition. Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1955.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London, New York: Verso, 2006.

Arnaud, Jean-Luc. *Le Caire, mise en place d'une ville moderne, 1867-1907: Des intérêts du prince aux sociétés privées*. Arles: Sindbad, 1998.

ʿAwaḍ, Ramsīs. *ʾIttijāhāt Siyāsiyyah fī al-Masraḥ qabla Thawrah 1919* [Political Orientations in the Theater before the 1919 Revolution]. Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Maṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 1979.

Ayalon, Ami. *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Ayalon, Ami. *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Badran, Margot. *Feminists, Islam, and the Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Badrawi, Malak. *Political Violence in Egypt, 1910-1924: Secret Societies, Plots and Assassinations*. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 2000.

Bakr, Abd al-Wahāb. *Al-Būlīs al-Maṣrī: Madkhal li-Taʾrīkh al-ʾIdārah al-Maṣriyyah, 1805-1922* [The Egyptian Police: An Introduction to the History of the Egyptian Administration, 1805-1922]. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wal-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyyah, 2016.

Bakr, Abd al-Wahāb. *Mujtamaʿ al-Qāhirah al-Sirrī, 1900-1951* [Cairo's Secret Society, 1900-1951]. Cairo: Al-ʿArabī lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2001.

Barak, On. *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.

Baron, Beth. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Bāshā, ʿAbīdū. *Aqūlu Yā Sādah: Tajribah al-Ḥakawātī min al-Taqlīd ʾila al-Ḥadāthah* [I Say Gentlemen: The Story-teller Experience from Tradition to Modernity]. Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2007.

Beinin, Joel and Zachary Lockman. *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*. London: Tauris, 1988.

Biancani, Francesca. "Let Down the Curtains Around Us": Sex Work in Colonial Cairo, 1882-1952". PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012.

Booth, Marilyn and Anthony Gorman (eds.). *The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Booth, Marilyn (ed.). *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010.

Booth, Marilyn. *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Boratav, P.N. "Ḳaragöz", in Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.). <http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2155/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3905>

Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinction: critique sociale du jugement.* Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979.

Çaksu, Ali. "Janissary Coffee Houses in Late Eighteenth-Century Istanbul" in Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2007), 117-32.

Calhoun, Craig (ed.). *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge. Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.

Carlier, Omar. "Le café maure: Sociabilité masculine et effervescence citoyenne (Algérie XVIIe-XXe siècles)," *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 4 (Jul. - Aug., 1990): 975-1003.

Çelik, Zeynep and Edhem Eldem (eds.). *Camera Ottomana: Photography and Modernity in the Ottoman Empire, 1840-1914*. Hande Eagle, trans. 1st edition. Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2015.

Ceylan, Feyza. "Eglence kavraminin Istanbul'da geçirdigi degisim süreci ve mekana etkisi". Dissertation, Istanbul Technical University, 2004.

Clancy-Smith, Julia. *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Clarence-Smith, William and Steven Topik (eds.). *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Çobanoğlu, Özkul. "Cultural Interrelationships between Turkish Minstrel Tradition and Egyptian Folk Culture in the Socio-Cultural Context of Coffeehouses in Alexandria and Cairo," *International Journal of Modern Anthropology*, 2 (2009): 57-65.

Collaco, Gwendolyn. "The Ottoman Coffeehouse: All the Charms and Dangers of Commonality in the 16th-17th Centuries," *Lights: The MESSA Quarterly*, 1/1 (Fall, 2011): 61-71.

Cole, Juan R. *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East : Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Cowan, Brian. *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005.

Cuno, Kenneth M. "Egypt to c. 1919," in Francis Robinson (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 5: The Islamic World in the Age of Western Dominance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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

Deeb, Marius. *Party Politics in Egypt: The Wafd and its Rivals, 1919-1939*. St. Antony's Middle East Monographs no. 9. London: Ithaca Press, 1979.

De Koning, Anouk. "Café Latte and Caesar Salad: Cosmopolitan Belonging in Cairo's Coffee Shops," in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (eds.), *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 221-35.

De Langle, Henry-Melchior. *Le petit monde de cafés et débits parisiens au XIXe siècle: évolution de la sociabilité citadine*. 1st edition. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1990.

Depaule, Jean-Charles. "Les établissements de café du Caire," *Études rurales*, 180 (Jul. - Dec., 2007): 245-62.

Desmet-Grégoire, Hélène (ed.). *Contributions au thème du café et des cafés dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient*. Aix-en-Provence: Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman, CNRS-Universités d'Aix-Marseille, 1992.

Desmet-Grégoire, Hélène. *Les objets du café dans les sociétés du Proche-Orient & de la Méditerranée*. Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1989.

Ellis, Aytoun. *The Penny Universities: A History of the Coffee-Houses*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1956.

Ellis, Markman. *The Coffee-House: A Cultural History*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2004.

El-Messiri, Sawsan. *Ibn al-Balad: A Concept of Egyptian Identity*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978.

El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Elsheshtawy, Yasser. "Urban Transformations: Social Control at al-Rifaʿi Mosque and Sultan Hasan Square," in Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (eds.), *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 295-313.

Evren, Burçak. *Eski Istanbul'da Kahvehaneler*. 1st edition. Istanbul: Milliet Yayinlari, 1996.

Fahmy, Khaled. *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Fahmy, Khaled. "An Olfactory Tale of Two Cities: Cairo in the Nineteenth Century," in Jill Edwards (ed.), *Historians in Cairo* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 155-87.

Fahmy, Khaled. "Modernizing Cairo: A Revisionist Narrative," in Nezar AlSayyad, Irene Bierman, and Nasser Rabbat (eds.), *Making Cairo Medieval* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 173-99.

Fahmy, Ziad. *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Fahmy, Ziad. "Popularizing Egyptian Nationalism: Colloquial Culture and Media Capitalism, 1870-1919". PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2007.

Foda, Omar. "The Pyramid and the Crown: The Egyptian Beer Industry from 1897 to 1963," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 46 (2014): 139-58.

Geoffroy, Éric. "La diffusion du café au Proche-Orient arabe par l'intermédiaire des soufis: mythe et réalité," in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 7-17.

Georgeon, François. "Les cafés à Istanbul à la fin de l'Empire ottoman" in Hélène Desmet-Grégoire and François Georgeon (eds.), *Cafés d'Orient revisités* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1997), 39-78.

Gershoni, Israel and James Jankowski. *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Ghazāl, Muṣṭafa Fawzī bin ʿAbd al-Laṭīf. *Daʿwah Jamāl al-Dīn al-ʾAfghānī fī Mīzān al-ʾIslām* [Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī's Ideology in the Balance of Islam]. Riyad: Dār Ṭībah, 1983.

Ginio, Eyal. "When Coffee Brought about Wealth and Prestige: The Impact of Egyptian Trade on Salonica," *Oriente Moderno*, Nuova serie, 86/1 (2006): 93-107.

Goldschmidt, Arthur. *A Brief History of Egypt* . New York: Facts on File, 2008.

Goldschmidt, Arthur. *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*. Boulder, Colorado, and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

Goldschmidt, Arthur. *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation State*. 2nd ed. Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 2004.

Goldschmidt, Arthur. "The Egyptian Nationalist Party". PhD diss., Harvard University, 1968.

Godlewska, Anne. "Map, Text and Image. The Mentality of Enlightened Conquerors: A New Look at the Description de l'Egypte," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20/1 (1995): 5-28.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, trans. Cambridge, Mass.: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1991.

Haine, W. Scott. *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Hanley, Will. *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Hanna, Nelly. "Coffee and Coffee Merchants in Cairo 1580-1630" in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 91-101.

Hanna, Nelly. *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004.

Hanna, Nelly. "The Urban History of Cairo around 1900: A Reinterpretation," in Jill Edwards (ed.), *Historians in Cairo* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 189-203.

Hammad, Hanan. *Industrial Sexuality: Gender, Urbanization, and Social Transformation in Egypt*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016.

Hathaway, Jane. *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdaglis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hattox, Ralph S. *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985.

Heise, Ulla. *Coffee and Coffee-Houses*. Paul Roper, trans. West Chester, PA.: Schiffer, 1987.

Hourani, Albert. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Humphreys, Andrew. *Grand Hotels of Egypt in the Golden Age of Travel*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011.

ʿImārah, Muhammad. *Qāsim Amīn wa-Taḥrīr al-Marʾah* [Qāsim Amin and the Liberation of Women]. Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1980.

ʾIsmāʿil, Muḥammad Ḥusām al-Dīn. "Le café dans la ville de Rosette à l'époque ottomane XVI-XVII siècle," in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 103-11.

Keall, Edward J. "The Evolution of the first Coffee Cups in Yemen," in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 35-51.

Keddie, Nikki R. *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn "al-Afghānī": A Political Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Kırlı, Cengiz. "Surveillance and Constituting the Public in the Ottoman Empire," in Seteney Shami (ed.), *Publics, Politics and Participation: Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2009), 177-203.

Kırlı, Cengiz. "The Struggle over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul, 1780-1845". PhD diss., State university of New York at Binghamton, 2000.

Kitroeff, Alexander. *The Greeks in Egypt, 1919-1937: Ethnicity and Class*. London: Ithaca Press, 1989.

Larguèche, Dalenda. "Le café à Tunis du XVIII au XIX siècle: Produit de commerce et espace de sociabilité," in Michel Tuchscherer (ed.), *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 181-213.

Landau, Jacob M. "Prolegomena to a Study of Secret Societies in Modern Egypt," *Middle East Studies* 1/2 (January 1965): 135-86.

Leconte, Marie-Laure Crosnier and Mercedes Volait (eds.). *L'Égypte d'un architecte: Ambroise Baudry (1838-1906)*. Paris: Somogy Éditions d'Art, 1998.

Marino, Brigitte. "Cafés et cafetiers de Damas aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, 75-76 (1995): 275-94.

Mestyan, Adam. *Arab Patriotism: The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

Mikhail, Alan. "The Heart's Desire: Gender, Urban Space and the Ottoman Coffee House" in Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Tauris, 2007), 133-70.

Mintz, Sidney. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonizing Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Muṣṭafa, Ḥasan Yūsuf Ṭaha. *Jamāliyyāt al-Makān: al-Maqha ʿinda Najīb Maḥfūẓ Namūdhaj^{an}* [The Aesthetics of a Place: The Coffeehouse as an Archetype in Naguib Mahfouz]. Cairo: Maktabah Būrṣah al-Kutub lil-Nashr wal-Tawzīʿ, 2013.

Nora, Pierre. *Les lieux de mémoire*. Paris : Gallimard, 1984.

Olson, Robert W. "The Esnaf and the Patrona Halil Rebellion of 1730: A Realignment in Ottoman Politics?," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17/3 (Sep., 1974): 329-44.

Örs, Ilay. "Coffeehouses, Cosmopolitanism, and Pluralizing Modernities in Istanbul," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 12/1 (2002): 119-45.

Özkoçak, Selma. "Coffeehouses: Rethinking the Public and Private in Early Modern Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History*, 33 (2007), 965-86.

Paige, Jeffery. *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Peirce, Leslie. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Peterson, Mark Allen. *Connected in Cairo: Growing Up Cosmopolitan in the Modern Middle East*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Pinsker, Shachar. *A Rich Brew: How Cafés Created Modern Jewish Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.

Prestel, Joseph Ben. *Emotional Cities: Debates on Urban Change in Berlin and Cairo, 1860-1910*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Raafat, Samir. "Freemasonry in Egypt: Is it still around?," *Insight Magazine* (March 1, 1999), http://www.egy.com/community/99-03-01.php.

Ramaḍān, Abd al-ʿAẓīm. *Taṭawwur al-Ḥarakah al-Waṭanīyyah fī Maṣr min Sanah 1918 ʾila Sanah 1936* [The Development of the National Movement in Egypt from 1918 to 1936]. Cairo: al-Muʾassasah al-Miṣriyyah, 1968.

Raymond, André. *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle.* Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, 1973.

Reynolds, Nancy. *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

Rittner, Leona (ed.). *The Thinking Space: The Café as a Cultural Institution in Paris, Italy, and Vienna*. Farnham, Surrey, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013.

Russell, Mona. *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863-1922*. 1st edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Ryzova, Lucie. "Egyptianizing Modernity through the 'New Effendiya': Social and Cultural Constructions of the Middle Class in Egypt under the Monarchy," in Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy Johnson, and Barak Salmoni (eds.), *Re-Envisioning Egypt, 1919-1952* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 124-64.

Ryzova, Lucie. *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. 1st edition. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Sajdi, Dana (ed.). *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Tauris, 2007.

Saleh, Mohamed. "A Pre-Colonial Population Brought to Light: Digitization of the Nineteenth Century Egyptian Censuses," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History*, 46/1 (2013): 5-18.

Sayyid, ʿAyman Fuʿād, *Al-Qāhirah: Khiṭaṭuhā wa-Taṭawwuruhā al-ʿUmrānī* [Cairo: Its Urban Planning and Development]. Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 2015.

Shami, Seteney (ed.). *Publics, Politics and Participation: Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa*. New York: Social Science Research Council, 2009.

Sharkey, Heather J. *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Sharkey, Heather J. *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Sheehi, Stephen. *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860-1910*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Shumays, Abd al-Munʿim. *Qahāwī al-ʾAdab wal-Fann fī al-Qāhirah* [The Literary and Artistic Coffeehouses in Cairo]. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1991.

Sökmen, Cem. *Aydinlarin iletisim ortami olarak eski Istanbul kahvehaneleri*. 2nd edition. Istanbul: Ötüken, 2012.

Spencer, Sharon. *Space, Time, and Structure in the Modern Novel*. New York: New York University Press, 1971.

Thompson, Jason. "Edward William Lane in Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 34 (1997): 243-61.

Tinkler, Penny. *Using Photographs in Social and Historical Research*. London: Sage, 2013.

Toledano, Ehud R. "Forgetting Egypt's Ottoman Past," in Jayne L. Warner (ed.), *Cultural Horizons: A Festschrift in Honor of Talat S. Halman*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001, 150-67.

Toledano, Ehud R. *State and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Topik, Steven. "Coffee as a Social Drug," *Cultural Critique* 71 (Winter, 2009).

Tuchscherer, Michel. "Les cafés dans l'Égypte ottomane (XVI-XVIII siècles)" in Hélène Desmet-Grégoire and François Georgeon (eds.), *Cafés d'Orient revisités* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1997), 91-112.

Tuchscherer, Michel. "Commerce et production du café en mer Rouge au XVI siècle," in idem., *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials: espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*, cahier des annales islamologiques 20 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001), 69-90.

Tuchscherer, Michel (ed.). *Le commerce du café avant l'ère des plantations colonials : espaces, réseaux, sociétés (XV-XIX siècle)*. Cahiers des annales Islamologiques 20. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2001.

Van Nieuwkerk, Karin. *"A Trade Like Any Other": Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Volait, Mercedes. *Architectes et architectures de l'Égypte moderne (1830-1950): Genèse et essor d'une expertise locale*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2005.

Volait, Mercedes. "Making Cairo Modern (1870-1950): Multiple Models for a 'European-Style' Urbanism," in Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait (eds.), *Urbanism: Imported or Exported?* (Chichester, England and Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Academy, 2003), 17-50.

Watenpaugh, Keith. *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Weigel, Hans, Christian Brandstätter, and Werner J. Schweiger. *Das Wiener Kaffehause*. Vienna: Molden Edition, 1978.

Weismann, Itzchak. "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism," *Arabica* 54/4 (Oct., 2007): 586-92

White, Merry I. *Coffee Life in Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Zarinebaf, Fariba. *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul, 1700-1800*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

INDEX