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THE EGYPTIAN LABOR CORPS: WORKERS, PEASANTS, AND THE STATE IN WORLD WAR I

Abstract

In this article, I detail the British imperial system of human resource mobilization that recruited workers and peasants from Egypt to serve in the Egyptian Labor Corps in World War I (1914–18). By reconstructing multiple iterations of this network and analyzing the ways that workers and peasants acted within its constraints, this article provides a case study in the relationship between the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state and rural society in Egypt. Rather than seeing these as two separate, autonomous, and mutually antagonistic entities, this history of Egyptian Labor Corps recruitment demonstrates their mutual interdependence, emphasizing the dialectical relationship between state power and political subjectivity.

Keywords: labor; peasants; social history; World War I

During World War I, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians—most of them illiterate workers and peasants from the countryside—worked in the Egyptian Labor Corps (ELC). At the height of the war, at least 10,000 ELC laborers were working in French port cities such as Marseilles, Calais, and Boulogne.¹ In France, they served alongside other migrant laborers recruited from places as far-flung as China, the West Indies, and South Africa, loading and unloading ships and transferring their contents to the nearest railhead for transport to the Western Front. When the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the British changed Egypt's legal status from an Ottoman province to a British protectorate, and recruited hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to work as logistical laborers supporting British imperial troops against the Ottomans and their allies in the Dardanelles, Mesopotamia, the Sinai Peninsula, Palestine, the Western Desert, and Sudan (see [Tables 1 and 2](#)).²

In this article, I detail the British imperial system of human resource mobilization that recruited workers and peasants from the Egyptian countryside to serve as logistical laborers in World War I. Labor recruitment networks bound ordinary Egyptians from all corners of the Nile Valley to one another, to their local administrative officials, and to wartime decision makers in Cairo, in London, and on the front lines of the war. By reconstructing this network and analyzing the variety of ways that state officials and recruits acted within its constraints, this article provides a case study in the relationship between the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state and rural society in Egypt. Whereas many historians

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TABLE 1. *Schedule of Egyptians employed with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, March 1916–June 1918*

Date	ELC	CTC	ICC	HTA	Remount	VS	Total
March 1916	8,935	10,423	16	0	0	163	19,537
June 1916	15,296	11,016	40	0	0	543	26,895
September 1916	26,231	15,077	56	625	0	428	42,417
December 1916	37,454	19,029	112	555	246	1,085	58,481
March 1917	49,036	20,739	170	1,275	218	1,110	72,548
June 1917	49,656	19,886	170	2,244	1,326	1,305	74,587
September 1917	55,263	21,109	168	4,217	1,165	1,459	83,381
December 1917	60,041	24,944	275	5,772	1,740	2,128	94,900
March 1918	62,675	23,872	219	5,949	2,025	2,838	97,578
June 1918	72,162	23,667	56	5,643	2,164	3,158	106,850

Source: FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/142 Wingate to Balfour, 15 September 1918.

Note: ELC, Egyptian Labor Corps; CTC, Camel Transport Corps; ICC, Imperial Camel Corps; HTA, Horse Transport, ASC; VS, Veterinary Service.

TABLE 2. *Total number of Egyptians recruited for service with the British army from 17 March 1917 to 30 June 1918*

Corps	Totals
Egyptian Labor Corps ^a	237,407
Camel Transport Corps	62,686
Imperial Camel Corps	530
Horse Transport, ASC	14,057
Veterinary Service	7,207
Remount Service	5,312
Total	327,199

Source: FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/142 Wingate to Balfour, 15 September 1918.

^aIncluding France, Mesopotamia, Salonika, Mudros, and Aqaba.

of Egypt have portrayed the central state and rural society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as separate, autonomous, and mutually antagonistic entities, I argue that the brief history of ELC recruitment suggests a more nuanced and interdependent relationship between them. In this article, I outline how workers and peasants developed new ways of interacting with state officials in reaction to wartime mobilization efforts, while simultaneously uncovering how the Anglo-Egyptian state changed its labor recruitment practices in response to recruits, their families, and their communities in the countryside.

THE SEARCH FOR THE PEASANT IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Workers and peasants occupy a tenuous position in the historiography of the Middle East. For generations, historians ignored these figures and instead emphasized the

role of elites. The “urban notables” paradigm pioneered by Albert Hourani in the mid-1960s, which focused on elites in the Syrian provinces and their relationship to their respective hinterlands and the imperial capitals of Cairo and Istanbul, provided a durable framework for scholars.³ The ascent of “new social history” in the 1980s and 1990s led to the first wave of efforts in Middle East studies to write “history from below,” incorporating the perspectives of previously neglected historical actors such as workers, peasants, women, slaves, and others.⁴ But, in recent years, the “cultural turn” has pushed back against the impulses that used to motivate the new social history. One influential critique originated in French poststructuralism, after intellectuals such as Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari began to focus in different ways on the question of psychic subjection through the repression of desire or *assujettissement*—which can be translated as being “subject to” power, but also as being “constituted by” it.⁵ Scholars focused on the Middle East have used this line of philosophical inquiry to critique the new social history, arguing that the quest to “recover lost subject perspectives” takes the enlightenment conception of the liberal humanist subject for granted, and thus normalizes and reifies forms of knowledge that are deeply contingent and—perhaps more importantly—deeply implicated in the history of colonialism. Instead of conceptualizing the political subjectivity of workers and peasants in terms of the self-formed, autonomous subject, scholars such as Timothy Mitchell and Lila Abu-Lughod have rethought consciousness, subjectivity, and agency as effects of modern forms of power and domination.⁶ For historians of the Middle East, the result of this shift has been to redirect scholarly attention toward the literate intellectuals who produced texts available for us to read on the one hand, and to cultural representations of rural people, women, and others constituted as objects of elite discourse on the other.⁷

Those interested in the lives of illiterate workers and peasants—who produced goods and services rather than texts accessible to the historian—therefore find themselves stuck in an epistemological quagmire. Some scholars have tended to cast the rural peasant as an obstacle or adversary to state policies.⁸ Scholars of peasant politics in Egypt during the late 19th and early 20th centuries cling to a parochial conception of the peasantry when they employ concepts such as “rural modes of production” or “peasant moral economy” to explain contentious politics in the countryside at different places and times.⁹ One recent manifestation of this tendency argues that world empires from the Ottomans to the British “failed” to establish hegemony in the peripheral region of Upper Egypt, where romantic representations of “outlaws” and “bandits” kept alive an essential spirit of resistance among the people over the course of five centuries.¹⁰ More recent efforts at colonial discourse analysis have analyzed peasant political subjectivities in modern Egypt as effects of certain national discourses and forms of knowledge production, thus subsuming the discussion of peasant political subjectivity entirely within the realm of elite culture.¹¹ These competing tendencies have led social historians of modern Egypt to an epistemological crossroads, summed up aptly by John Chalcraft: “the existing historiography, while varying the historical role, value, and meaning of peasant and state, preserves both as radically distinct, self-creating, and self-defining collective agents involved in zero-sum and violent antagonism.”¹²

This article builds on recent efforts to transcend this impasse in Middle East studies. These efforts focus neither on recovering lost subject perspectives nor on analyzing peasant subjectivity as an effect of modern forms of power, but rather on the complex

and dialectical *relationship* between power and resistance as two poles in the constitution of political subjectivity. In a recent study of petitions sent to the Khedive in Egypt during the second half of the 19th century, Chalcraft argues that petitioning should be seen as a distinct mode of politics that evokes “not passivity, silent subversion, or revolution, but sophisticated engagement and negotiation with state practice and discourse.”¹³ Similarly, Anne Clément’s study of folk songs sung by migrant laborers on the archaeological dig sites of Upper Egypt, and collected by the archaeologists themselves, locates peasant subjectivity in the act of “performance” in front of the powerful employer. According to Clément, the relational dynamics embodied in performative acts allowed laborers to variously internalize, negotiate, and subvert the liberal norms that were being imparted to them by the encroaching system of labor contracting.¹⁴ These scholars provide more nuanced depictions of the mutually constituting dynamics involved in the formation of peasant political subjectivity and elite power. Rather than seeing rural society and the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state as diametrically opposed, starting from different points, and locked in perpetual struggle, scholars such as Chalcraft and Clément foreground the importance of social relationships and acts of exchange, which structure peasant social and political processes while simultaneously providing opportunities to transcend structural domination and assert individual or collective interests.

In this article, I extend this nuanced picture of the relationships between power and resistance, state and society, and city and countryside, to the history of Egypt during World War I. The participation of Egyptian peasants in World War I has largely been ignored in the historiography of the war. Although the vast majority of World War I studies focus on the Western Front, some historians have recently begun to explore the Middle Eastern theaters of battle. Their work has examined the Ottoman war effort, the technical and logistical aspects of the British campaigns in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and the human experiences of troops and civilians in the Sinai Peninsula and Syria-Palestine.¹⁵ Other recent studies have acknowledged the large role played by non-Western laborers in all theaters of the war.¹⁶ One article by Mario Ruiz even focuses on the ELC laborers as they were represented in wartime photography in Palestine, but it does not address the question of ELC recruitment.¹⁷ As for scholars of British imperialism in Egypt, many have used 1914 as a convenient end point in periodizing their studies.¹⁸ While this choice is understandable given the variety of new circumstances inside and outside Egypt caused by the war, it obscures the significant continuities in the state–society relationship before and during the war. The situation is somewhat better in the Arabic-language scholarship. Important studies by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi‘i, Amin ‘Izz al-Din, and Latifa Salim all provide rich detail about the wartime mobilization efforts and place them in the context of Egyptian history, but mostly lack a rigorous analytical framework.¹⁹ To date, we lack a comprehensive analytical study of the wartime mobilization effort in English.

The few scholars who have addressed the wartime mobilization effort in Arabic and English have relied on the same problematic model of the state–society relationship outlined earlier by portraying ELC recruitment as either “voluntary” or “coercive.” During World War I, the British went to great lengths to characterize ELC recruiting as “voluntary” in their official communications within the government and in the press.²⁰ But Egyptian nationalist leaders challenged this assertion, with Sa‘d Zaghlul writing in his memoirs, “the men of the government boast that they oppose forced

conscription [*al-tajnīd al-ijbārī*] [and] even prohibit it, but the authorities in all the corners of the country, for several days, have taken to kidnapping people [*yatakhḥaṭṭafūn al-nās*] from the markets and the roads, and from their homes in the villages.”²¹ Historians have preserved the terms of this debate between British colonial officials and Egyptian nationalists. For example, Amin ‘Izz al-Din characterizes the early years of ELC recruitment as “voluntary contracting” (*ta‘āqud ikhtiyārī*), but later in the text refers to it as “kidnapping” (*khaṭaf*).²² Ellis Goldberg describes a similar type of chronological development, whereby the “British . . . offered wage employment to peasants in the Labor Corps and forcibly recruited them when too few volunteered.”²³ ‘Izz al-Din and Goldberg thus reproduce the binary in terms of a teleological development from voluntary to forced recruitment—which ultimately culminates in the anticolonial nationalist revolution of 1919. Furthermore, Goldberg analyzes the decision to join the ELC in terms of a “chicken game,” following political scientists such as Samuel Popkin in reading the history of peasant politics through the frame of “rational choice.”²⁴ In many ways, then, the existing historiography of ELC recruitment reproduces the binary thinking that has played itself out in this historiography of peasant and state in late 19th- and early 20th-century Egypt, described earlier.

In this article, I argue that reducing the complex phenomenon of labor migration to something that is simply either *voluntary* or *coercive* obscures the variety of ways that the labor recruitment effort transformed the terrain of peasant life and state power. “Volunteers,” though they did exist, were hemmed in by the realities of wartime social and economic life. Similarly, those who were “kidnapped” against their will were able to assert their agency and, ultimately, to transform the practices of the colonial state. On a more fundamental level, then, this history of ELC recruitment calls into question the rigid distinction between the state and rural society that exists in much of the historiography of Egypt under British imperialism. Rather than imagining workers and peasants as set apart from state mobilization efforts—either rationally deciding to enter into labor contracts or being forced against their will to join up with the ELC—I focus on how labor recruitment bound the Anglo-Egyptian state and rural society together, dialectically transforming the contours of political subjectivity and state power.

ADMINISTRATIVE PRESSURE

With the Sinai/Palestine campaign grinding to a stalemate in early 1917, discussion began in London as to whether Egypt was contributing its “fair share” to the war effort. On 21 May, the head of the British army sent a telegram to the commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), which had been formed the previous year to begin the offensive against the Ottomans in Syria-Palestine via the Sinai Peninsula (Tables 1 and 2). The message read, “It is essential that all parts of the empire should share in the strain [of the war] as far as local conditions admit . . . As regards Egypt, I am not satisfied that this is the case.”²⁵ The commander responded, “It has always been my opinion that . . . Egypt has not felt the strain of war at all and I have constantly studied the question as to how to utilize Egyptian resources more fully.”²⁶ On 2 June, the War Office, which oversaw the military wing of His Majesty’s Government in London, sent a telegram to the Foreign Office, which oversaw the British High Commissioner in Egypt, inquiring the opinion of the secretary of state Arthur Balfour if forced conscription

could be instituted in the country. The military wanted to raise 17,000 more men, on a permanent basis not subject to renewals, and at the low level of pay prevailing for soldiers at the time.²⁷

This request was communicated to the High Commissioner, and a meeting was convened in Cairo on the subject. At that meeting, representatives of the Anglo-Egyptian army objected to forced conscription on the grounds that the army could not spare enough officers to manage such a large force of workers. Foreign Office officials on the ground also objected because “no sense of loyalty towards the British Empire could be counted upon to secure the support of any appreciable proportion of the population.”²⁸ Therefore, in his telegram to the War Office, the undersecretary of state wrote, “Balfour is in agreement with . . . the conclusions reached by the committee at Cairo,” effectively rebuffing the War Office’s request to institute forced conscription.²⁹

But the impression that “Egypt is profiting by the war without endeavoring to make any adequate return” persisted among military leaders in the War Office and was continuously communicated to the high commissioner, Reginald Wingate.³⁰ Wingate passed along these criticisms to the Egyptian prime minister, Husayn Rushdi, writing in August 1917 about “the urgent need of a telegraph here at the earliest possible moment to detail the measure that you have the intention of taking to increase recruitment.”³¹ Rushdi responded quickly with a proposal.³² At the next meeting of the Egyptian Council of Ministers, Rushdi communicated his plan to the Ministry of Interior.³³ In light of objections by the Anglo-Egyptian army, it was decided that an increase in pay for engagements in the ELC was impracticable, but that exemption from military service and an extra effort from provincial functionaries—referred to under the euphemism “administrative pressure”—could be done. So, on 20 October 1917, the minister of war issued a decree modifying the Egyptian Conscription Law (*qānūn al-qur‘a*) so that “every person liable for military service . . . shall be exempt from the obligation to such service if he shall enlist in and serve for a continuous period of one year with . . . any auxiliary service attached to the British troops.”³⁴ In order to publicize the scheme, a decree from the Egyptian monarch, Fu‘ad I, was published in the Egyptian daily *al-Afkar* (Thoughts) touting the benefits of service in the “Egyptian Labor Corps [*firqat al-‘umāl al-miṣriyya*] or the Camel Transport Corps [*firqat al-naql bi-l-jamal*] or any other branch of service attached to the armies of his Highness the King.”³⁵

An effort was also made to distribute the recruiting burden more evenly throughout the country. In the course of his investigations, Wingate was “interested to learn” that recruitment had, until that point, “practically affected Upper Egypt alone.”³⁶ British officials explained this imbalance with reference to the lower wages prevailing in the south—which made the terms of the labor contracts offered by military authorities more attractive to southerners—and to the basin irrigation in the four southernmost provinces of the country—which resulted in little to no local demand for labor after the harvest.³⁷ According to official statistics, 28,986 men were recruited in Upper Egypt from the beginning of the war through 2 May 1917, while 53,549 were enlisted in Lower Egypt between 6 December 1916 and the end of April 1917.³⁸ Lower Egypt offered some advantages in that the bulk of the rural population lived in the fertile lands of the Delta, and thus there was a much larger pool of laborers from which to draw compared to Upper Egypt. But, the British found that the fellahin from the Delta were less willing to leave their homes for protracted periods of time compared to the *ṣa‘āyda* of Upper

Egypt, perhaps because they were less accustomed to the practice of migrant labor. Consequently, through the summer of 1917, contracts for Lower Egyptians had been fixed for three months at a time, while those for Upper Egyptians extended to six months. On 1 November 1917, contracts were standardized for all laborers throughout the country at six months.³⁹

The system of “administrative pressure,” therefore, was formed out of a sort of compromise between the military authorities of the War Office, the civilian diplomats in the Foreign Office, and the Egyptian government of Rushdi. The War Office pushed for conscription, but the Foreign Office rebuffed its repeated calls. Instead of conscription, the diplomats of the Foreign Office decided to put pressure on the system of village administration to produce the massive number of laborers requested by the War Office. Under this new system, the local functionaries in the Ministry of Interior—the *‘umdas* (village headmen), *ma’ mūr*s (district-level executives), *khafīrs* (village security guards), and *mudīrs* (provincial-level executives)—would be the crucial intermediaries responsible for securing the laborers demanded for the war effort.

‘UMDAS, MA’MŪRS, KHAFĪRS, AND MUDĪRS

The Ministry of Interior was important to the recruitment effort because it served as the administrative link between the government in Cairo and the countryside of Egypt. At the time, Egypt was divided into fourteen *mudiriyyāt* (provinces), each directed by a *mudīr* (governor); *mudiriyyāt* were further subdivided into *marākiz* (districts), each directed by a *ma’ mūr* (overseer).⁴⁰ *Mudīrs* and *ma’ mūr*s were required to send regular reports to the Ministry of Interior in Cairo on judicial and political measures undertaken in their respective jurisdictions.⁴¹ This system penetrated into the villages through the figure of the *‘umda* or *shaykh al-balad*. By World War I, then, the small cadre of British diplomats circulating between Cairo and Alexandria leveraged a much larger network of officials in the Ministry of Interior, which had official or quasiofficial representatives in many of Egypt’s over 3,000 villages.

In issuing orders to the local administrative officials in the Ministry of Interior, Rushdi tried to impress upon them that they had to handle the task of recruitment delicately and use their “moral authority.” A circular from Rushdi to the provincial authorities followed up the October decree. Rushdi urged the *ma’ mūr*s and the *‘umdas* to “encourage the rural folk to enroll themselves in the ‘Labor Corps,’ and to offer their efforts to spread this idea to the public.”⁴² In Rushdi’s communications with Wingate prior to the order, he also emphasized the need to spread “propaganda in the villages through the *ma’ mūr*s and the *‘umdas* in favor of entrance into the corps” and for “the *mudīrs* . . . to support entrance into the corps with the full weight of their authority.”⁴³ Rushdi seemed to conceive of the authority held by these local functionaries in the Ministry of Interior as a benign, charismatic force able to “encourage the rural folk to enroll *themselves*” in the ELC through “propaganda” and “applying the full weight of their authority,” rather than forcibly conscripting them to join the ELC against their will.

But if officials in the Egyptian government hoped that workers and peasants would flock to join the Labor Corps because of the “moral authority” of their local village headman, this was wishful thinking on their part. In implementing the system of “administrative pressure,” local officials carried out their duties and dealt with problems

in a manner that was much more dependent on sheer violence than charisma or moral influence. In his report of 1 May 1916, the British inspector in charge of the Camel Transport Corps (CTC), which included a force of Egyptian laborers drawn from the same pool as the ELC to serve in the Sinai/Palestine campaign as camel drivers, noted that “drivers supplied through the governors of the provinces are not all volunteers” and “forced labor . . . is practically what has been supplied up to now.”⁴⁴ G.E. Badcock’s description of the CTC lends credence to this conclusion: “the first recruits were volunteers, which is to say that of every three, one came to avoid the police, one was sent by the police, and one was a respectable wage earner.”⁴⁵ In February 1918, the adviser to the Ministry of Interior complained, “Mamurs and Omdehs are using pure compulsion to show good recruiting figures.”⁴⁶ In the summer of 1918, the Ministry of Interior issued instructions to the British inspectors, warning against the practice of “grabbing men off roads.”⁴⁷ Salama Musa describes the scene at a recruiting levy as he claims to have witnessed it:

I traveled to the countryside [*al-rīf*]—a village near al-Zaqaziq—and I saw how the English ruled over us [using] the Egyptian administration [*muwazzafīn*] [including] *ma’mūrs*, *mudīrs*, and policemen to kidnap our resources [*li-khaṭaf maḥṣūlātina*]. . . . A man would be tied by a thick rope around his trunk and [he would be] behind another like him, and they marched in this state until they reached the district. There, they were put into a jail cell, and then sent to Palestine.⁴⁸

According to Musa, then, Egyptians would be snatched up off their fields, bound by a thick rope, and led away to join the Labor Corps. This style of recruitment, backed up with the armed force of the *khafīrs*, essentially amounted to kidnapping laborers and sending them off to war.

Some *‘umdas* also amassed large fortunes by accepting bribes to exempt people from recruitment. In March 1915, the Egyptian daily newspaper *al-Ahram* (The Pyramids) ran a series of articles on the *‘umda* of the village of al-Mahmudiyya in al-Buhayra province. The initial article of 1 March reports that the *‘umda* had been accused of “accepting bribes from one of [the villagers] in order to exempt him from the draft [*al-qur‘a*].”⁴⁹ Two days later, *al-Ahram* issued a retraction. The retraction mentions that the public was “shocked” by the article, but reassures readers that ultimately the case was unfounded, and the newspaper had been “lying” and was guilty of “libel.”⁵⁰ The initial article may have been an instance of libel. But it is also possible that British censors caught the writers at *al-Ahram* reporting on a subject they did not want publicized: the recruitment of laborers for the war effort. In the context of the massive censorship effort by the British during the war, these reports may be an instance where one report slipped past the censors only to be retracted later.⁵¹ Contemporary observers also accused the *‘umdas* of accepting bribes. Musa recounts one story of an *‘umda* “owning six acres, who gathered 5,000 LE [for himself], while the peasants went hungry because they paid these bribes out of pocket.”⁵² P. G. Elgood also notes that many *‘umdas* made personal fortunes by taking such bribes.⁵³ By accepting bribes and forcing those without the means to pay them into service, recruitment under the system of administrative pressure became a deeply regressive, in-kind tax on the rural inhabitants of the provinces.

‘Umdas also used their new discretionary powers to protect themselves, their family, and their property from being subject to the whims of the British colonial state. The *‘umdas* were able to secure their own sons exemptions from recruitment.⁵⁴ In addition, some managed to protect their own property from confiscation by the Military

Authorities. By the fall of 1917, the British had moved towards forcible dispossession of camels in the provinces to meet the demands of the CTC.⁵⁵ In October of that year, the *ʿumda* of Asyut was involved in a trial that received press coverage after he was forced to resign for hiding his camels from the Military Authorities.⁵⁶ In addition, in the summer of 1917, the British recorded the activities of certain notables who were “hindering the voluntary commitments to the ELC” around their personal agricultural estates.⁵⁷ By impeding labor recruitment, these large landowners endeavored to maintain a steady supply of agricultural laborers at harvest time in order to avoid having to pay inflated wages in conditions of labor scarcity. Local officials, therefore, were able to take advantage of the labor recruitment network not only through positive authorities accumulated in their hands, but also through the negative ability to keep the state from expropriating their own family and property.

All of Rushdi’s attempts to represent the *ʿumdās*, *maʿmūrs*, *khafīrs*, and *mudīrs* as possessing some kind of “moral authority” in the countryside that they could wield as “soft power” to convince the villagers to join the Labor Corps ultimately rang hollow. Although the Egyptian government attempted to frame their authority along these lines, their recruitment efforts could not be carried out without recourse to violent and arbitrary force. With their actions essentially unchecked by central authorities in Cairo, local officials were able to consolidate financial and social power in the countryside through a variety of practices such as taking bribes and generally manipulating the recruitment process to their own benefit. But their growing boldness and audacity in these manipulations led them into conflict with the workers and peasants whom they were tasked with recruiting.

ENGAGING WITH THE RECRUITMENT NETWORK

Thus, a new generation of workers and peasants throughout Egypt confronted the imposition of a harsh tax to be paid to the state in the form of their own bodily labor. In this section, I examine how workers and peasants engaged with this new labor recruitment network. The first option available to them was, of course, to join the ELC. Latifa Salim finds evidence of laborers approaching the military authorities of their own initiative and asking to sign up for terms of service in the Gallipoli campaign.⁵⁸ A report published in *al-Ahram* in March 1916 announced, “Out of work laborers and others looking for work [can] find a good opportunity [*furṣa sāniha*] to join in service to the Military Authorities, which gives an active wage of not less than seven piasters per day . . . and [pays the workers] salaries in advance of their travel.”⁵⁹ This report—issued as it was during a time of heavy military censorship—offers a particularly positive valence to joining up with the auxiliary labor corps. It also seems to have exaggerated the wages expected for a low-level laborer, which were five piasters per day for the ELC and six piasters per day for the CTC.⁶⁰ But even at these rates, peasants could make more than the normal wage of three piasters per day for migrant laborers before the war.⁶¹ New recruits were also supposed to be given an advance on their salaries of three pounds (i.e., 300 piasters or roughly one hundred times the daily wage of a migrant laborer at the time) to support their dependents during their absence.⁶²

The memoir of ʿAbd al-Hamid Muhammad Husayn provides insight into the considerations at play for workers who joined the ELC. According to this document—which was published more than fifty years after the war in the Egyptian magazine *Ruz*

al-Yusuf—Husayn was a rare example of a literate recruit. In the beginning of his story, Husayn emphasizes the paramount role played by financial constraints in the space of his village, writing, “poverty is what governed over everything in [my] humble neighborhood . . . and poverty gives birth to values and laws” (*wa-m’a al-faqr tawlida al-muthul wa-l-qawānīn*).⁶³ He writes that he had been working in casual migrant labor since the age of eleven, treating the actual moment of his recruitment into the ELC very briefly by writing only that he “found himself joining the soldiery” (*wajadtu nafsī iltāḥiq bi-l-‘askariyya*).⁶⁴ He continued to re-enroll in the ELC multiple times. After his first tour of duty in Gallipoli in 1915, he returned to Egypt and joined up again for multiple tours in Sudan. Finally, in 1917, Husayn re-entered the ELC for a final tour supporting the EEF in the Sinai/Palestine campaign.⁶⁵ Because he was literate, Husayn rose quickly through the ELC hierarchy, attaining the rank of *awmbashi*, which gave him authority over the storehouse for his ELC encampment in Palestine.

Just as Husayn described poverty as imposing certain “laws” that “governed over” his neighborhood, poverty and financial constraints played a paramount role for many families in the rural and urban working classes at the time. After the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914, general uncertainty led British industry to reign in expenses. With demand decreasing in the Lancashire cotton mills, it soon became clear that the Egyptian cotton harvest of summer 1914 would be “left unpicked, rotting in the ground.”⁶⁶ Buying and selling of cotton, which was the lifeblood of the Egyptian economy, ground to a halt when the market at Alexandria simply shut down in August and September. Soon afterwards, banks and moneylenders became fearful of debtor insolvency, and began to make a more concerted effort to collect outstanding loans from small farmers.⁶⁷ This created a downward spiral for cash-poor peasants who were accustomed to living off credit while they waited to reap the rewards of their harvest. Workers in Egypt’s major urban centers also suffered from economic hardship at the beginning of the war. Unemployment skyrocketed as major businesses tried to cut back on expenses, and the businesses of enemy nationals were closed. Many of the workers in urban areas were originally migrants from the countryside, so, in light of public security concerns, the government took steps to return migrant laborers back to their villages of origin. In September 1914, 3,000 Upper Egyptians were relocated from the Mediterranean ports of Alexandria and Port Sa’id, and an additional 1,900 were evacuated from the Delta town of Damanhur.⁶⁸

For this large population of cash-strapped and unemployed peasants and laborers, the ELC could provide opportunities for financial relief. If laborers could get themselves classified as “skilled,” they could receive “bounties” of fifty to one hundred piasters (i.e., ten to twenty times the daily wage for an “unskilled” laborer in the ELC) for each additional time they re-enrolled in the auxiliary labor corps.⁶⁹ British military authorities established schools that provided courses for laborers to attain skills to become mechanical transport drivers, clerks, or officer attendants.⁷⁰ Others would take a premium for waiting until a man was condemned to service and then offering to take his spot in the ELC. One British adviser wrote of “thousands” of recruits “ready to volunteer” who “stand out for something extra before joining.” According to his report, men could make from one to seven pounds (i.e., 2,000 to 14,000% of the daily wage for a low-level unskilled laborer in the ELC) extra by doing this. The adviser also mentions a second-hand report of eighty men in Damanhur “waiting outside [of the *markaz*

building] . . . who were willing, for a consideration, to take [the recruits'] places."⁷¹ Although British characterizations of their own policies in Egypt should certainly be taken with a grain of salt, it seems that there is some evidence—both in English and Arabic—that workers approached the recruitment effort as a financial or even entrepreneurial opportunity and sought to join the military authorities.

As for those who were not eager to sign up for service in the ELC, they resorted to a variety of means to negotiate with, subvert, or resist the recruitment network. One important means of engaging with the state over the subject was petitioning the government for exemption from recruitment. According to the British adviser, the Ministry of Interior had received 4,919 such petitions and granted exemptions in 596 or 12 percent of cases between May 1918 and March 1919.⁷² The ministry received petitions “from recruits or their parents,” indicating that kinship networks were often mobilized in the course of drafting each petition.⁷³ At the time, petitioning was a common method employed by villagers seeking redress for their grievances with the state.⁷⁴

Besides petitioning, workers and peasants used violence to resist incorporation into the recruitment apparatus entirely. The Foreign Office files in the British National Archives contain thirty-five reports of violent resistance to recruitment issued within the Ministry of Interior in just over three months from 19 May 1918 to 27 August 1918.⁷⁵ Historians have rarely discussed these reports, but they hold important implications for our understanding of peasant politics during this crucial period in Egypt's transition from empire to nation-state. All told, the records show that the battles between villagers and the local officials who were working to conscript them in the summer of 1918 led to the deaths of three *khafirs*, two *umdās*, and eighteen villagers. A further thirty-five *khafirs* and twenty-two villagers were wounded, and at least seventy-nine villagers were arrested.

The most common method of violent resistance was for individuals to fight back against recruitment officials as they grabbed them off of roads or from their homes. Eighteen of the thirty-five cases (51 percent) can be categorized as this type of individual resistance. These acts were generally unsuccessful, as local administrative or judicial officials ultimately apprehended the perpetrators. Although firearms constituted the largest category of weapons used in the incidents, the records show almost as many cases of stabbing, along with a significant number of cases in which recruiting officers were beaten with seemingly any implement available to the villagers, including sticks, stones, kitchen knives, and axes.⁷⁶

The Ministry of Interior also received a number of reports of physical resistance by kinship groups, with eleven out of thirty-five cases (31%) qualifying. Family members could have coordinated their effort in advance once knowledge of the recruitment process became widespread in the countryside. One important reason families were able to mobilize quickly to respond to threats on a family member was because they often lived nearby.⁷⁷ The family as a site of resistance also involved the women of the countryside. One British NCO in charge of an ELC company in Palestine described the “departure of a levy” of workers as “an occasion of despondent disarray”:

The recruited men [walked] along together escorted by native police, who were hard pressed to restrain the crowd of women and other relatives following their menfolk to the railway station,

wailing and waving mournful arms as the train of open trucks moved northward, bearing its human load irresolute between the grief of parting and doubts as to unknown troubles ahead.⁷⁸

This description of the police as “hard pressed to restrain the crowd of women” betrays the physical threat posed by women as actors involved in resistance against conscription. Another case involving women comes from Nag^c Hamadi in the Upper Egyptian province of Qina, where relatives “interfered” with the recruiting process. Upon seeing this interference, the *khafirs* fired at the offenders, “wounding a man and a woman.”⁷⁹ Wives were also called to testify against their husbands after they had been apprehended for resisting.⁸⁰ Another way women contributed to resisting labor recruitment was through marriage. ‘Izz al-Din relates a spate of marriages that “spread like wildfire” in an unspecified village in response to a rumor that the military authorities had decided to “gather” (*hashd*) the unmarried in their conscription tours.⁸¹ Indeed, the family status of recruits was supposed to be taken into account by recruiting officials, with “heads of families” exempt from recruitment according to the law.⁸² Women could thus be involved in outright physical resistance or a more subtle style of resistance through marriage, and they were persecuted and attacked by judicial and administrative authorities for their role in such acts.

Besides resistance on an individual or family level, mass uprisings took place encompassing larger groups of actors—up to and including entire villages. At least seven examples of mass resistance connected to recruitment for the ELC and CTC are preserved in the Foreign Office records. The largest example of mass resistance reported in the archives comes from the Delta province of Daqhiliyya. The report focuses on the police lieutenant posted at the “Biala Outpost,” who was preparing to leave for the Talkha district center with recruits in tow when “about two hundred villagers gathered and interfered with him, persistently asking for the release of Mohamed el Sayed.” The confrontation apparently came to blows, as the lieutenant and some of the other policemen at the outpost required medical treatment for the wounds they received. The *ma’mūrs* from Talkha and Kafr al-Shaykh, along with policemen from outposts in Kafr al-Gharb and Bilkas, were sent to the scene and thirty-one villagers were arrested.⁸³

The recruitment effort therefore sparked a variety of new repertoires of contentious politics in the Egyptian countryside by the end of World War I. Workers and peasants responded in ways that engaged with the state, such as sending in petitions to the central government, as well as ways that rejected the state through physical violence directed against state officials. The situation seems to have come to a head in the summer of 1918, when at least thirty-five separate incidents of violent resistance took place in a three-month period.

THE GOVERNMENT’S RESPONSE: REINSTITUTING THE CORVÉE

So far, we have traced the process of recruiting workers and peasants for the ELC from the top down. We have seen how demands for conscription from the Military Authorities in the War Office were relayed to civilian officials in the Foreign Office, how those diplomatic officials worked with the Egyptian government to produce the compromise solution of “administrative pressure,” how this system empowered the midlevel officials in the Ministry of Interior, and how the villagers who were subject to

recruitment responded. But the recruiting process was also driven from the bottom up. In this section, we will see how the actions of the peasantry and the numerous acts of violent resistance taking place in the countryside described above ultimately fed back into the decision-making process and impacted the form of the recruitment effort.

As early as February 1918, the British were aware of the problems with “administrative pressure.” In a report from that month, the adviser to the Ministry of Interior complained, “Mamurs and Omdehs are using pure compulsion to show good recruiting figures. This gives recruiting a bad name and it is against the wish of the army.”⁸⁴ On 6 May, a meeting was convened of the British advisers and the military authorities to find a solution to the problems. At the meeting, John Haines, the adviser to the Ministry of Interior, suggested, “Labor should be requisitioned from the villages on a sort of *corvée* system.”⁸⁵ This would be based on the system for public works projects known as “Nile Defense Works,”⁸⁶ which had already prepared lists of 16,000 men to work for 150 days before the Nile flood to dredge irrigation canals and dig new canals to divert water in order to ensure the canals did not overflow.⁸⁷ These Nile Defense Works were the last remaining relic of the old *corvée* system, but they received a new lease on life during the recruitment effort for the Labor Corps.

The reinstatement of the *corvée* was significant because it represented a total reversal in British policy of the past thirty years. In his communications with Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour in London, Wingate provided a mixed assessment of the decision to employ the *corvée*. He referred to it as “the methods which we have now in a sense been constrained to employ” and called it an “expedient . . . not in agreement with the general sentiment and character of our administration of Egypt.” But he nevertheless justified the decision to use “the *corvée*, which has legal force and with which the population is familiar.”⁸⁸ With its long history in the countryside, the *corvée* proved to be a tool that was ready-at-hand for the British when demand for Egyptian labor ramped up in 1918.

The British attempted to portray the reintroduction of the *corvée* as an effort to reduce the abuses of the *‘umdas*. Indeed, when Fu’ad I complained of recruiting abuses, Wingate pointed to the reintroduction of the *corvée* scheme as the solution to the problem.⁸⁹ The preface to the Ministry of Interior announcement of the scheme stated that the reasons behind its promulgation were “the numerous complaints received by the ministry, some of which presume an exercise of abuse, by the Omdehs and public employees, of their powers, for reasons of a purely personal nature.”⁹⁰ The British accused the *‘umdas* of “neglect” when they saw that the proportion of recruits to total population was much smaller in some districts as compared to others.⁹¹ It was therefore hoped that the use of *corvée* lists would centralize and systematize recruiting; by having a list they could refer to, the British attempted to take some of the discretionary power away from the local functionaries, thereby reducing complaints of abuse and corruption from the population.⁹²

But if the theoretical goal of reintroducing the *corvée* lists was to limit the exposure of recruits to the arbitrary whims of the *‘umdas*, the practical implementation of the system actually left much up to their discretion. It was clear that the lists prepared by the Ministry of Public Works could not be imported wholesale to the task of military recruitment without modifications. In a circular to the provinces, the Ministry of Interior instructed none other than the *‘umdas* themselves to prepare the new lists “on the basis of lists prepared over the past year for the men charged with guardianship of the Nile

banks.” The final lists should exempt anyone less than eighteen years or more than forty-five years of age, along with military recruits who have already passed a medical exam, heads of families, and employees of “societies and administrations occupied with technical employment.” In addition, no more than three men per family were to be subject to recruitment.⁹³ According to the British, the *ʿumdas* were the only figures with enough “official intelligence” about the locality in which they lived and governed to be able to make judgments about such detailed classes of exemption.⁹⁴

Complaints persisted about the *ʿumdas* into the summer of 1918. According to Haines, the reforms succeeded in that the *ʿumda* “has no choice about whom he sends,” but, he wrote, “the trickery is in the lists themselves.”⁹⁵ By giving the local authorities the ability to write the list, the British had essentially institutionalized their arbitrary power in the villages. The Ministry of Interior soon came up with a further reform proposal. It suggested that the *ʿumdas* produce double the number of recruits required for his district, where the *maʿmūr* would “make enquiries and release half of those produced.” It was hoped that this would “give greater contentment” to the workers and peasants subjected to recruitment by giving them a chance to appeal to an authority above the *ʿumda*, even if the total number recruited remained the same.⁹⁶ By August, Haines was reporting on the status of the reform: “I was in Mansura Markaz a day or two ago when the Mamur was going through [the recruits] and everything was going smoothly.”⁹⁷

By the end of World War I, then, the British push to recruit laborers had given the *ʿumdas* an unprecedented ability to consolidate power in their own hands. The *ʿumdas* amassed fortunes by taking bribes to exempt potential laborers and were able to protect their own property from being expropriated by the colonial state. Attempts to reign in these abuses led the British to reintroduce the old practice of *corvée* labor, which they had strongly denounced in the years prior. Moreover, the actual implementation of this policy—dependent as it was on the intelligence at the village level only the *ʿumda* could provide—had the effect of giving the *ʿumdas* an institutionalized means through which to continue exercising arbitrary authority. The most the British could do to check the concentration of power in the hands of the *ʿumdas* was to install checks and balances in the figure of the *maʿmūr*, another class of rural intermediaries, which added an additional layer between British colonial officials and the population they were attempting to administer.

CONCLUSION

By studying the recruitment of the ELC, this article has attempted to transcend the epistemological impasse in studies of rural Egypt, which see peasant and state as two mutually opposed, self-creating, and antagonistic entities. After a close study of ELC recruitment in 1917–18, we can see a number of problems with this model of the state-society relationship. First, in closely following the decision-making process of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state during the recruiting effort, we have seen that military officials in London and on the front lines in the Sinai Peninsula and Palestine received pushback from diplomatic officials in London and Cairo, officials in the Egyptian government, and officers in the Anglo-Egyptian army. These administrators, far from implementing their negotiated solution from on high, came to rely on the *ʿumdas*, *maʿmūrs*, *mudīrs*, and *khafīrs* who had the local knowledge, experience, and ability to gather recruits. In turn,

the village administrators acted not as subordinates to the central state, but as leaders of their own private fiefdoms, within which they were now able to consolidate wealth and power and exile personal rivals into ELC service. The decision to reimplement the corvée in 1918 is perhaps the best example of the limits of Anglo-Egyptian state power. The corvée had a long history in Egypt dating at least to Ottoman times, and while official policy had long been to work towards its abolition, the proliferation of incidents and riots associated with ELC recruitment ultimately led the British to renege on this policy and further devolve power to provincial intermediaries.⁹⁸ Compared to the notion of state power advanced by colonial discourse analysts, the picture of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state that emerges from this history is less totalizing, more open to influences from global developments and local actors, and fundamentally dependent on intermediaries who were able to refashion colonial governmentality to suit their own ends.

This article has also shown that workers and peasants cannot be seen as separate, self-contained actors, thinking only in terms of their parochial interests and fundamentally in tension with the state. It is true that a great many rejected the recruitment effort and worked—often in vain—to free themselves from service to the ELC. But to reduce all labor recruitment to “forced conscription” is to miss crucial parts of the story. In enacting their displeasure with recruitment—both through peaceful means such as petitioning and through the use of violence—workers and peasants changed the course of state policy in the countryside as it had been practiced for a generation. Furthermore, not all laborers were “forced” to go. Cash-strapped workers and peasants chose to join the ELC, and others found ways to make extra money by offering to take the place of the forcibly conscripted or enrolling in the schools established by military authorities. Even in the difficult and bloody summer of 1918, laborers such as ‘Abd al-Hamid Husayn were volunteering to reenter the ELC on multiple tours of duty. As draft riots turned to nationalist revolution in the spring of 1919, ELC laborers remained loyal to their British officers.⁹⁹ One British MP even floated the idea of using the ELC to replace coalers in Port Said who were on strike in sympathy with the nationalist cause.¹⁰⁰

In this sense, then, the ELC recruitment effort constitutes an important part of the prehistory of the 1919 revolution. Less than a year after the draft riots of 1918, the countryside would again erupt into violence after the exile of nationalist political leaders during their bid to represent Egypt at the Paris Peace Conference. In March 1919, rioters took to the streets in provincial towns and villages across the Egyptian countryside. They destroyed train tracks, cut telegraph wire, and protested against many of the same government employees who were responsible for labor recruitment, and who were also symbols of British colonialism. Scholars have long seen the rural riots of March 1919 as having spread from Cairo to the countryside as part of a “nationalist revolution.” But a nationalist revolution centered in Cairo cannot account for why rural inhabitants worked to close off their villages from the railroads and telegraph lines that connected them to the cities, nor why some provincial towns went so far as to establish so-called “national committees” or autonomous governments that claimed independence from the central state in Cairo.¹⁰¹ Understanding the ELC recruitment effort that unfolded in the years prior to the revolution as a complex and networked process—which devolved power to local actors such as midlevel officials in the Ministry of Interior or rioting peasants just as much as it centralized power in the hands of British decision makers—provides

important background for understanding how the revolution unfolded at a local level in villages and towns throughout the Egyptian countryside.

NOTES

¹British National Archives (BNA) WO 107/37, "Controller of Labour Report on Labour with the British Expeditionary Force in France," 14 November 1919. See also John Starling and Ivor Lee, *No Labour, No Battle: Military Labour during the First World War* (London: The History Press, 2009), 275–76. The Arabic historiography seems to put the number of Egyptians in France at 15,000. See Amin 'Izz al-Din, "Awwal Dirasa 'an Sabab Ham min Asbab bi-Thawrat 1919: Al-Shughul fi al-Sulta: Qissat Filaq al-'Amal al-Misri wa-Filaq al-Jamal," *al-Musawwar*, March 1969. By the time British soldiers arrived on the front lines in the newly opened Italian theater of the war on 4 November 1917, there were also 2,009 Egyptians of the ELC employed on the Italian port of Taranto. BNA CAB 27/14.

²Three thousand Egyptians served in the Gallipoli campaign. Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*, 107; Amin, "Awwal Dirasa." 8,000 Egyptians served in Mesopotamia. Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*, 278; Latifa Salim, *Misr Fi al-Harb al-'Alimiyya al-Ula* (Alexandria: al-Hay'a al-'Ama li-Maktabat al-Iskandariyya, 1984), 245.

³Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1981). Hourani first presented this essay in 1966, and his "politics of notables" paradigm proved to be a durable way for scholars to understand the history and social organization of the Middle East. For useful reviews of the "notables paradigm," see Philip S. Khoury, "The Urban Notables Paradigm Revisited," *Revue Du Monde Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 55 (1990): 215–30; and James L. Gelvin, "The 'Politics of Notables' Forty Years After," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 40 (2006): 19–30.

⁴For helpful reviews of the labor literature, see Zachary Lockman, *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994); Donald Quataert and Eric Zürcher, *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1995); Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Donald Quataert, "Labor History and the Ottoman Empire, C. 1700–1922," *International Labor and Working Class* 60 (2001): 93–109. For reviews of the "peasant studies" movement in Middle East studies, see Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury, *Peasants & Politics in the Modern Middle East* (Miami, FL: Florida International University Press, 1991); Nicholas Hopkins and Kristen Westergaard, *Directions of Change in Rural Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998); and Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad, "The Region of Upper Egypt: Identity and Change," in *Upper Egypt: Identity and Change*, ed. Nicholas Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004). For studies of women and gender, see Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie, *Women in the Muslim World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Judith Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Madeline C. Zilfi, ed., *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998). For studies of slavery in the Middle East, see Gabriel Baer, "Slavery and Its Abolition," in *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt*, ed. Gabriel Baer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 161–89; Eve Troutt-Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003); and Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵Camille Robcis, "China in Our Heads: Althusser, Maoism, and Structuralism," *Social Text* 30 (2012): 52.

⁶Timothy Mitchell, "Everyday Metaphors of Power," *Theory and Society* 19 (1990): 545–77; Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990): 41–55.

⁷See Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Michael Ezekiel Gasper, *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2012). For a broader discussion on how these trends have affected historians

in general, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁸For Tignor, the colonial state was confronted with peasants who were an obstacle to the government's efforts at "modernization." Robert Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule in Egypt, 1882–1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), 142. For Harik, the Nasserist state was judged by its (in)ability to affect behavioral change in a "depoliticized" peasantry. Iliya Harik, "Continuity and Change in Local Development Policies in Egypt: From Nasser to Sadat," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 43–66. For Khaled Fahmy, Mehmed 'Ali's state was met with rebellion and resistance in its efforts to institute conscription. Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1997).

⁹Nathan Brown, *Peasant Politics in Modern Egypt: The Struggle against the State* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990); Reinhard Schülze, "Colonization and Resistance: The Egyptian Peasant Rebellion in 1919," in *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (Miami, Fl.: Florida International University Press, 1991), 171–202.

¹⁰Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2013).

¹¹Timothy Mitchell's work inspired a range of scholars to pursue colonial discourse analysis. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1988). Recent efforts employing this methodology include Omnia El-Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); Gasper, *The Power of Representation*; and Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity*.

¹²John Chalcraft, "Engaging the State: Peasants and Petitions in Egypt on the Eve of Colonial Rule," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37 (2005): 303. Similar epistemological problems have emerged in a variety of fields since the last quarter of the 20th century, including British Marxian labor history, Anglo-American feminism, and the "Subaltern Studies" school of colonial South Asian historiography. See Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1988): 189–224.

¹³Chalcraft, "Engaging the State," 304.

¹⁴Anne Clément, "Rethinking 'Peasant Consciousness' in Colonial Egypt: An Exploration of the Performance of Folksongs by Upper Egyptian Agricultural Workers on the Archaeological Excavation Sites of Karnak and Dendera at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (1885–1914)," *History and Anthropology* 21 (2010): 73–100.

¹⁵Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014); Eugene L. Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); David R. Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

¹⁶For studies of logistical laborers, see Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*; Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Mehmet Beşikci, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For studies of non-Westerners serving as soldiers in Europe, see Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 737–69; and Christian Koller, "The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War" 26 (2008): 37–41.

¹⁷Mario Ruiz, "Photography and the Egyptian Labor Corps in Wartime Palestine, 1917–1918," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 56 & 57 (2014): 52–66.

¹⁸Robert Tignor, *Modernization and British Colonial Rule*; Tignor, *State, Private Enterprise, and Economic Change in Egypt, 1918–1952* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Eric Davis, *Challenging Colonialism: Bank Misr and Egyptian Industrialization, 1920–1940* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Aaron G. Jakes, "State of the Field: Agrarian Transformation, Colonial Rule, and the Politics of Material Wealth in Egypt, 1882–1914" (PhD diss., New York University, 2015); Claire Jean Cookson-Hills, "Engineering the Nile: Irrigation and the British Empire in Egypt, 1882–1914" (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2013).

¹⁹Abd al-Rahman al-Raf'i, *Thawrat 1919: Tarikh Misr al-Qawmi min 1914 ila 1921* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1947); Salim, *Misr Fi al-Harb*.

²⁰BNA FO 141/798, "Circulars Concerning Voluntary Employment in the ELC"; BNA FO 141/667/1 No. 2689/171, "Synopsis of Voluntary Recruiting Circulars," 6 June 1918; BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/31 Rushdi to Wingate.

²¹Quoted in Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*, 252.

²²'Izz al-Din, "Awwal Dirasa."

²³Ellis Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt—Egypt 1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992): 263.

²⁴Goldberg writes, "service in the Labour Corps could be dangerous enough to make volunteering for the corps irrational," and emphasizes the importance of "economic and extra-economic incentives in regard to determining the outcome of the chicken game" among suppliers of labor (i.e., workers and peasants). Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt," 269. See also Samuel Popkin, "The Rational Peasant – The Political Economy of Peasant Society," *Theory and Society* 9 (1980): 411–71.

²⁵BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/13 Chief London to Chief EEF, 21 May 1917.

²⁶BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/17 Murray to WO, 24 May 1917.

²⁷BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/16 Murray 6 July 1917. The total desired strength of the ELC was to be 100,000. Murray put the number of laborers employed by the EEF at that time at approximately 98,000, but he included 15,000 casual laborers in this pool.

²⁸BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2869/12 Minutes of Meeting, 28 May 1917.

²⁹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/17 FO 18 June 1917.

³⁰BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/19 Graham to Wingate, 23 August 1917.

³¹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/21 Wingate to Rushdi, 23 August 1917.

³²This proposal included provisions to raise the pay of the laborers with the difference covered by the Egyptian government; a release from military service for every man who served in the auxiliary labor corps for at least one year; exemptions from certain taxes; and "tours of the provinces by a high functionary of the Ministry of Interior to manage the execution of these orders." BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/21 Wingate to Rushdi, 23 August 1917.

³³BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/31, "Traduction de Deus Circulaires Addresser par les Ministere de l'Interieur aux Moudirs et Gouverneurs au Sujet du Labour Corps," 28 August 1917.

³⁴BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2869/42 Ministry of War, 19 October 1917.

³⁵"Firqat al-'Umal al-Misriyya," *al-Afkar*, 22 October 1917.

³⁶BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/7 Herbert to Haines, 3 May 1917.

³⁷BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/8 Haines to Herbert, 13 May 1917.

³⁸These statistics are unreliable. The document notes that for the early part of the time official statistics were kept, the Middle Egyptian provinces of Beni Suef and Fayyum were included as part of "Upper Egypt," and they were later changed and considered part of "Lower Egypt." BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/8 Hazel to Haines, 12 May 1917.

³⁹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/64 Allenby to Wingate, 13 February 1918.

⁴⁰There were also five *muḥāfiẓāt* directed by a *muḥāfiẓ*, including the "governorates" of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, the Canal Zone, and Damietta.

⁴¹F. Robert Hunter, *Egypt under the Khedives, 1805–1879: From Household Government to Modern Bureaucracy* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 18–19.

⁴²BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/44 Rushdi, 21 October 1917.

⁴³BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/22 Rushdi to Wingate, 24 August 1917.

⁴⁴BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/1 Whittingham, 1 May 1916.

⁴⁵G.E. Badcock, *A History of the Transport Services of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force 1916–1918* (London: Hugh Rees Ltd., 1925), 31.

⁴⁶BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/60a Haines, 5 February 1918.

⁴⁷BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/134 Haines to Wingate, 6 August 1918.

⁴⁸Salama Musa, *Tarbiyyat Salama Musa*, 4th ed. (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Ama li-l-Kitab, 2012 [1947]), 112. Also cited in 'Izz al-Din "Awwal Dirasa"; and Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*.

⁴⁹"Itiham 'Umda," *al-Ahram*, 1 March 1915.

⁵⁰"Daf'a Firiyya," *al-Ahram*, 3 March 1915.

⁵¹For more on censorship of the press during World War I, see Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation through Popular Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁵²Musa, *Tarbiyyat Salama Musa*, 113.

- ⁵³P. G. Elgood, *Egypt and the Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), 318.
- ⁵⁴Cf. BNA FO 141/667/1 No. 2689/171 Claghin to Allenby, 5 July 1920, "Synopsis of voluntary recruiting circulars—6 June 1918."
- ⁵⁵Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*, 266.
- ⁵⁶DKM "Umdat Asyut," *al-Afkar*, 10 October 1917.
- ⁵⁷BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/31 Rushdi to Wingate, 28 August 1917.
- ⁵⁸Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*, 408.
- ⁵⁹Quoted in 'Izz al-Din, "Awwal Dirasa."
- ⁶⁰BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/64 Allenby to Wingate, 13 February 1918.
- ⁶¹Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*, 188.
- ⁶²BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/64 Allenby to Wingate, 13 February 1918.
- ⁶³'Abd al-Hamid Husayn, "Khamisa wa-Saba'in 'Aman bayn Qibat al-Masajid wa-Jaysh al-Ingiliz, wa-Sugun Isra'il," *Ruz al-Yusuf*, 17 June 1968.
- ⁶⁴Ibid.
- ⁶⁵Ibid., 24–25.
- ⁶⁶Elgood, *Egypt and the Army*, 51.
- ⁶⁷Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*, 104–5.
- ⁶⁸Salim, *Misr fi al-Harb*, 175.
- ⁶⁹But the "vast majority" of laborers received no bonus for re-enrollment. BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/38 Wingate, 20 September 1917.
- ⁷⁰BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/63 Memo from the Ministry of Finance, 9 February 1918.
- ⁷¹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689, Haines, 30 June 1918.
- ⁷²BNA FO 141/667/1 No. 2689/171 Claghin to Allenby, 5 July 1920.
- ⁷³BNA FO 141/667/1 No. 2689/171 Claghin to Allenby, 5 July 1920.
- ⁷⁴For examples, see Brown, *Peasant Politics*, 174; and Chalcraft, "Engaging the State," 304.
- ⁷⁵BNA FO 142/797/2 "Raising the Egyptian Labour Corps."
- ⁷⁶For examples, see BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/110 Ministry of Interior 19 June 1918 for a report from the Delta province of Gharbiyya about an act of individual resistance in which villagers used a kitchen knife and a *nabūt*, or a wooden stick used in a popular combat game, to resist the *khafirs*.
- ⁷⁷For example, see BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/86 Ministry of Interior, 21 May 1918 for a different report from Gharbiyya detailing relatives "living in a neighbouring house" resisting the recruitment of their family member with sticks and an axe.
- ⁷⁸Imperial War Museum (IWM) EKV/2, E.K. Venables Papers, *They Also Served: The Story of the ELC in Sinai and Palestine* (unpublished manuscript).
- ⁷⁹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/119 Ministry of Interior, 3 July 1918.
- ⁸⁰For example, see BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/86 Ministry of Interior, 21 May 1918.
- ⁸¹Amin, "Awwal Dirasa," 26.
- ⁸²BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/96 Rushdi to Mudirs circular No. 10, 26 May 1918.
- ⁸³BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/88 Haines, 25 May 1918.
- ⁸⁴BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/60a Haines, 5 February 1918.
- ⁸⁵BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/75 Notes of Meeting at the Residency, 6 May 1918
- ⁸⁶BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689 Haines, 26 May 1918. See also BNA FO 141/798 "Circulaire Concernent l'Enrôlement Volontarie."
- ⁸⁷See BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/66 MacDonald, 2 March 1918.
- ⁸⁸BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/142 Wingate to Balfour, 15 September 1918.
- ⁸⁹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/129 Wingate, 25 July 1918.
- ⁹⁰BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/96 Rushdi to Mudirs circular No. 10, 26 May 1918.
- ⁹¹BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/78 Copy of Letter from Rushdi to Mudirs, 8 May 1918
- ⁹²BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/89 Haines 26 May 1918; BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/87b Keon-Boyd, 26 May 1918.
- ⁹³BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/96 Rushdi to Mudirs circular No. 10, 26 May 1918.
- ⁹⁴BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/96 Rushdi to Mudirs, 30 May 1918.
- ⁹⁵BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/134 Haines, 6 August 1918.
- ⁹⁶BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/85 Keon Boyd, 30 May 1918.
- ⁹⁷BNA FO 141/797/2 No. 2689/134 Haines, 6 August 1918.

⁹⁸For more on the history of the corvée in Egypt, see Muhammad Anis, *Tatuwwur al-Mujtama' al-Misri min al-Iqta' ila Thawrat 23 Yulyu 1952* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Jablawi, 1977); and Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). On British efforts towards its abolition, see Nathan Brown, "Who Abolished Corvee Labor in Egypt and Why?," *Past & Present* 144 (1994): 116–37.

⁹⁹On 9 April 1919, in the middle of the revolution, officer Venables writes in his diary: "our ELC men worked quietly all day." IWM EKV 1/4 E.K. Venables Diaries.

¹⁰⁰BNA FO 371/3717 Parliamentary Question.

¹⁰¹For example, see Schülze, "Colonization and Resistance"; 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rafi'i, *Thawrat 1919*, chap. 6.; and Salah 'Azzam, "Maris 1919 al-Dami wa-l-Fallahun," *Ikhtarna li-l-Fallah* 2 (1967): 34–41.