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Murder in Alexandria:

The Gender, Sexual and Class Politics of Criminality in Egypt,

1914 - 1921

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Nefertiti Mary Takla

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Murder in Alexandria:
The Gender, Sexual and Class Politics of Criminality in Egypt,
1914 - 1921

by

Nefertiti Mary Takla
Doctor of Philosophy in History
University of California, Los Angeles, 2016
Professor Nile Spencer Green, Co-Chair
Professor Nancy Gallagher, Co-Chair

My dissertation analyzes the effects of World War I on the port city of Alexandria, Egypt through the investigation and trial of a serial murder case that took place in 1920 - 21. The victims of the serial murders were seventeen women who had engaged in clandestine sex work in Alexandria during the war, and their death marked the rise of domestic trafficking networks in interwar Egypt. Two of the female accomplices to the murders, Raya and Sakina, became scapegoats for the crime and were the first women in Egyptian history to receive the death penalty. Numerous Egyptian films, TV shows and comedies have been produced about these murders in recent decades, and the case is still widely known throughout the Middle East today as "Raya and Sakina." Despite the many afterlives of this case, no historian has studied the two thousand pages of handwritten legal records that were produced about these murders. My dissertation utilizes the records of the Egyptian National Archives and Library, the microfilm collection of the National Judicial Studies Center in Egypt, and the digitized materials of the

Bibliotheca Alexandrina to analyze the case in its broader historical context. I argue that the murder of the clandestine sex workers and the execution of Raya and Sakina marked the formation of new relationships of power between workers, the state, and an expanding middle class, and new discursive relationships between gender, sexuality, class and criminality. This study examines how these relationships were institutionalized legally, materially, spatially, and discursively, leading to the spread of middle-class modernity in Egypt and the beginning of the end of cosmopolitan Alexandria.

The dissertation of Nefertiti Mary Takla is approved.

Sarah Stein

Michael Cooperson

Nile Spencer Green, Committee Co-Chair

Nancy Gallagher, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

To all the unreformables out there

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Vita	xiv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Changing Landscape of an Occupied City: World War I and the Beginning of the End of Cosmopolitan Alexandria	9
Chapter 2: Navigating the Boundaries of Respectability: Mobile Sex Workers and Clandestine Prostitution Networks	51
Chapter 3: In Search of the Unreformable Criminals: Positivism and the Construction of Criminality in Early Interwar Egypt	106
Chapter 4: The Politicization of Morality: The Gender, Sexual and Spatial Politics of Middle-Class Formation	156
Chapter 5: "I Fooled the Government of al-Labbān": Political Economy and Working-Class Resistance in Early Interwar Alexandria	191
Bibliography.....	229

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Map of Alexandria showing al-Saba' Banāt Street and the railway station.

Figure 1.2: Map of Alexandria with enlarged sections of al-Labbān and al-'Aṭṭārīn

Figure 1.3: Table of the number of ships and tonnage arriving at the port of Alexandria between 1913 and 1924

Figure 1.4: Table of occupations declared in Alexandria census records in 1907 and 1917

Figure 2.1: Map of Alexandria showing red light districts

Figure 4.1: Mug shots of Raya (left) and Sakina (right) published in *Wādī al-Nīl* on November 28, 1920

Figure 4.2: Cigarette Advertisement in *al-Kashkūl*, No. 198, February 17, 1925, page 18

Figure 5.1: Map of Alexandria showing Anaṣṭāsī Street and al-Saba' Banāt Street

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Before I acknowledge the wonderful people and places that contributed to my success, I want to acknowledge the pain and suffering that I lived through while writing this dissertation. I want to acknowledge the experience of being sexually harassed by a trusted mentor who had the power to end my career, and how that experience nearly destroyed me. I want to acknowledge the strength and courage it took to hold my ground and fight back. I want to acknowledge the way in which this struggle has empowered me and brought me back to life. I now know what it means to be a survivor.

This dissertation was an integral part of my struggle. It was the one thing that anchored me to this world while I was battling severe depression after the sexual harassment. It was my only hope for victory and a happy ending. I am one of the lucky few for whom the dissertation fulfilled the promise of an academic job. I am one of the lucky few who get to write their acknowledgements while a job awaits them. I was lucky to survive a very difficult struggle. And because of this, I can acknowledge my story from a position of power.

The sexual harassment I experienced in graduate school was not my first encounter with violence. During my third year of graduate school, I escaped a domestically violent husband. I was terrified and attempted to protect myself with a restraining order, but I never fought back. I never sought justice. I just ran away. We are taught that this is how to survive domestic violence. Perhaps this is true, but the act of running away did not make me whole. The act of turning to authorities for protection - authorities who did not want to believe me in the first place - was not empowering. I have learned that we cannot regain our sense of agency from running away or from running to others for protection.

When I was violated a second time in graduate school, this time by a trusted mentor, I decided that I was not going to run away. I would stay and fight back. In fact, given the nature of academia, my survival depended on fighting back. Filing reports and complaints with various local and federal authorities was my way of fighting back. Withstanding the horror of seeing my story publicized on the internet was my way of fighting back. Finishing my dissertation and getting a job was my way of fighting back. And as I struggle not to allow my self-worth to be defined by my productivity and success, as I struggle against this dehumanizing middle-class logic that I have written about in my dissertation, I can't help but smile at the fact that I have achieved my goal of speaking out without destroying my career. As I write these acknowledgements while staring at my breathtaking view of the sun setting over the Hudson River, as I recall how it was only less than a year ago that I had wanted to die, I can't help but relish this moment of victory.

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The list of people who have made this dissertation possible feels endless, and I will only begin to scratch the surface here. Most importantly, I thank my former partner, Matthew Bowles, who was a fountain of love, strength, and encouragement for me for seven years. I thank my dear friend, Rezzan Karaman, whose intuition has always been two steps ahead of mine. I thank my dear family for their unconditional love and for welcoming me back home while I was working on the last chapter of my dissertation. I thank my wonderfully supportive mentors and dissertation committee chairs, Nile Green and Nancy Gallagher, who agreed to become my advisors before ever having met me and who have always had faith in me. I thank my other committee members, Sarah Stein, Stephen Frank, and Michael Cooperson, whose feedback on my chapters has been indispensable. I thank my colleagues and friends who have read, listened to, and/or commented on my work, including Alma Heckman, Zoe Griffith, Walid Asfour, Mary Momdjian, Cassandra Markoe, Arnon Degani, Ceren Abi, Kyle Anderson, and Secil Yilmaz. I especially thank Alma for her comments on several drafts and for being a loving friend, and I thank Zoe for being my treasured archive buddy for several months. I am indebted to Wilson Jacob for allowing me to pick his brain on many occasions while we were on an ARCE

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our Interlibrary Loan staff who helped me gain access to newspapers on microfilm. I thank Djodi Deutsch at ARCE for doing everything possible to ensure my safety and success in Egypt; Madame Nadia, Madame Nagwa, and Madame Raga' at the Egyptian National Archives for their generous assistance in helping me locate relevant sources; and all the wonderful workers in the printed materials section of the Egyptian National Archives and in the newspaper room and copy center of the Egyptian National Library. I also thank Sahar Hamouda and Mohamed Awad at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina for their assistance in tracking down historical sources in Alexandria.

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of whom I have never met. I hope we have entered a new era in which we no longer have to remain silent for the sake of our careers.

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Introduction

On November 15, 1920, an elderly man living in the al-Labban district of Alexandria, Egypt reported a shocking discovery to his local police station. While installing a new sewage system in an apartment building managed by his family, he dug up the skeleton of a woman. This discovery led to an intensive two-month investigation in which the corpses of seventeen women were found, most of them in homes that had been rented by two sisters, one of them named Raya and the other named Sakina. Over the course of the investigation, the state prosecutor learned that Raya and Sakina had used these homes as clandestine brothels and that most of the murder victims had been engaging in clandestine sex work. Although the judges who presided over the trial determined that the sisters had acted as accomplices rather than perpetrators, Raya and Sakina still received the death penalty. On December 21, 1921, they became the first women in modern Egyptian history to be executed.

During the investigation and trial, the Egyptian media followed the serial murder case closely, eventually naming it "The Raya and Sakina Case."¹ Newspapers published in Cairo and Alexandria denounced the sisters as barbarians who deserved no mercy. Their execution was portrayed as a victory for the Egyptian nationalist movement, which was credited with saving the nation from criminals at a moment when the colonial state was too busy protecting itself. This middle-class fascination with the case has continued practically unabated over the past one hundred years. Numerous Egyptian films, TV shows and comedies have been produced about the case, all of them presenting the sisters as either the primary perpetrators or masterminds of the

¹ Throughout the dissertation, I refer to this case as "The 1920 Alexandria serial murder case" rather than "The Raya and Sakina case" due to the fact that Raya and Sakina were neither the murderers nor the masterminds of the serial murders.

serial murders.² Even today, it is difficult to find an Egyptian who hasn't heard of Raya and Sakina, and their story now illicitly as much laughter as it does horror.

Despite the prominent role that Raya and Sakina continue to play in Egyptian popular memory, no historian has attempted to study the legal records of this case. One of the reasons for this is the difficulty of accessing twentieth-century criminal court records in Egypt, which are housed outside of the Egyptian National Archives in an early modern citadel called Dār al-Maḥfūzāt. Yet unlike the vast majority of twentieth-century criminal court records, the legal records of this case are also available on microfilm at the National Judicial Studies Center in Cairo.³ Seven hundred and twenty-five pages of these records have also been digitized by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina through a project called *Dhākirat Miṣr al-Mu'āṣara*.⁴ After gaining access to these sources, I decided to dedicate my dissertation to a historical analysis of this case and why it represents a turning point in the history of modern Egypt.

My dissertation analyzes the legal records of the case in combination with other archival sources and media reports to contribute to the field of Middle Eastern studies in several ways.

First, my work builds on the efforts made by Khaled Fahmy and Will Hanley to shift the focus

² For example, see *Raya wi Sakina*, a 1953 film written by Naguib Mahfouz; *Raya wi Sakina*, a 1985 theatrical comedy featuring Shadia, which became famous across the Middle East; and *Raya wi Sakina*, a 2005 television soap opera aired during the month of Ramadan, which is known throughout the Middle East as the period in which the most popular TV shows are released.

³ Many thanks to Will Hanley for bringing this microfilm to my attention.

⁴ Information about the case in this dissertation is based on these records, in addition to excerpts from the legal records found in Muḥammad 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt: Al-Waqā'i' al-Mu'alim 'Andama Tantashir al-Radhila Bayn al-Bashr [The Prostitution Underworld: The Disturbing Events that Occur When Vice Spreads]* (Cairo: Oscar lil-Nashr wil-Tawzi', 2010). This book contains excerpts from the investigation records of the case, in addition to photographs of original records. To verify their accuracy, I compared these excerpts to the investigation records digitized by *Dhākirat Miṣr al-Mu'āṣara* and to the notes that I took on the two thousand pages of legal records about the case at the National Judicial Studies Center in Cairo. I also obtained additional details about the case from a 923-page investigative journalistic account of the case written by a prominent Egyptian journalist named Ṣalāḥ 'Īsa. See Ṣalāḥ 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina: Sīra Sīyāsīyya wi Ijtimā'īyya [Raya and Sakina's Men: A Sociopolitical Biography]* (Cairo: Dār al-Aḥmadī lil-Nashr, 2002).

away from elites in cosmopolitan port cities to non-elites.⁵ Most of the histories that have been written about cosmopolitan Alexandria focus on the wealthy, powerful and especially foreign elites who lived in this city. Yet the port city of Alexandria was also a haven for poor migrants, both from Southern Egypt and from across the Mediterranean world. Raya, Sakina and their husbands were among the many Southern Egyptian migrants who settled in Alexandria during World War I. These migrants saw Alexandria as a land of opportunity and many of them worked in factories, on the docks, or in the service sector. As I discuss in Chapter 1, the frequent demographic flux that characterized port cities during this period produced a fluidity and porosity that I refer to as a cosmopolitan landscape. The ability to set out on a new beginning is what made this cosmopolitan port city attractive to migrants. Deception, fooling, passing, and blending in was the key to survival in the working-class neighborhoods of Alexandria, especially during World War I. As I discuss in Chapter 2, this fluidity made Alexandria a prime location for clandestine sex work, which brought together men and women from various social classes. In Chapter 4, I examine the growth of middle-class anxieties about this fluidity after the war, and I analyze how the desire to harden gendered and sexual boundaries between workers and the petite bourgeoisie became central to the execution of Raya and Sakina and the making of the Egyptian middle class.

My analysis of this serial murder case further contributes to the field of Middle Eastern studies by shedding light on the understudied period of World War I in Egypt. Most histories of

⁵ See Will Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria, 1880 - 1914" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2007); Khaled Fahmy, "For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor: Some Critical Notes on the History and Historiography of Modern Alexandria," in *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004); and Khaled Fahmy, "Towards a Social History of Modern Alexandria," in *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004).

Egypt end at 1914 or begin in the interwar period, leaving us with little knowledge about how the war shaped the lives of those who lived through it. As I explain in Chapter 1, while Egypt was not a site where battles were fought, it was a site of wartime colonial exploitation by the British Army. The British had begun colonizing Egypt in 1882, but their control over the country greatly expanded when they put Egypt under martial law during WWI. Wartime colonial exploitation took the form of monopolizing shipping routes and destroying foreign trade, which created widespread unemployment for dock, transport and factory workers; requisitioning local food supplies, which resulted in a high rate of inflation; and forcibly recruiting young men to work as manual laborers for the British army, which left many married women and children without a means of financial support. The British Army restructured the economy of Egypt under martial law to support Allied military objectives, with negative consequences for native workers. Raya and Sakina's husbands were among the men who served as manual laborers for the British Army during the second half of the war, and it was during this period of widespread unemployment and rampant inflation that the two sisters decided to support themselves by opening a clandestine brothel near a military camp in Alexandria. Chapter 5 shows that understanding the effects of WWI on workers is essential for explaining popular support for the anti-colonial uprisings in early interwar Egypt, often referred to as the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, which challenged four decades of British colonial rule and culminated in a semi-independent Egyptian state in 1922.

Through an analysis of Raya and Sakina's clandestine sex business, I build on scholarship about the sex trade in Egypt and particularly in Alexandria, on which little has been written.⁶ In Chapter 2, I examine the problems that were embedded in Egypt's prostitution regulation system, and the reasons that women of various social classes chose to engage in part-time clandestine sex work in Alexandria rather than registering as a prostitute with the state.⁷ In Chapter 5, I build on this analysis of the sex trade by examining the relationship between sex work and the broader Alexandrian economy, and how economic transformations after the war led to the serial murders. The destruction of foreign trade during the war had enabled the growth of small industry and independent production, leading to the expansion of the informal economy. Working-class neighborhoods in Alexandria became sites of illicit activity, including unlicensed streetwalkers, unlicensed brothel owners, unlicensed bar, restaurant and cafe owners, and even unlicensed cigarette makers. With the resumption of foreign trade after the war, large businesses began to dominate the economy and traffickers began to dominate the local sex trade. Chapter 3 examines the way in which the serial murders marked the destruction of female mobility and independence in Alexandria's sex trade, and how middle-class conceptions of crime and criminality led the state prosecutor to ignore the shifting structure of the sex trade in his investigation of the murders.

⁶ For studies of the sex trade in Egypt, see Bruce Dunne, "Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process" in Modern Egypt" (PhD diss., Georgetown, 1996); Francesca Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains Around Us: Prostitution in Colonial Cairo, 1882 - 1952" (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012); Hannan Hammad, "Mechanizing People, Localizing Modernity: Industrialization and Social Transformation in Modern Egypt: al-Mahalla al-Kubra, 1910 - 1958" (PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2009); Liat Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women: Sex, Law and Medicine in Khedival Egypt* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Khaled Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century," in *Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Eugene Rogan (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

⁷ Throughout the dissertation, I frequently use the term "sex worker" rather than "prostitute" to highlight the fluidity in the clandestine sex trade, where women often worked multiple jobs simultaneously. I also use the term "sex worker" because women who engaged in clandestine sex work often did so precisely because they wished to avoid being labeled a prostitute.

In contrast to Lisa Pollard's argument in *Nurturing the Nation*, Chapters 3 and 4 argue that the legal and media response to the murder case shows that constructing the Egyptian nation did not only entail "nurturing" the governed.⁸ The execution of Raya, Sakina, their husbands, and two working-class *fitiwwa* made it clear that middle-class nationalists believed there were some people who could not be nurtured, reformed or governed. The duty of the state was to keep this unreformable, ungovernable class away from 'respectable' society. The politicization of morality in both the legal and media response to the murder case thus marked an attempt to define the boundary of the middle class from below. While existing literature on the Egyptian middle class elucidates the way in which gender and sexuality was integral to its discursive formation,⁹ what has not yet been explored is how this discursive formation was achieved through the erection of spatial, material, and cultural boundaries that attempted to divide an expanding middle class from the working poor. Chapter 4 examines the dialectic between the discursive, material and spatial construction of the Egyptian middle class in the early interwar period, highlighting the way in which the response to the murder case was integral to the spread of middle-class modernity in Egypt.

The final way in which this dissertation contributes to literature on the history of modern Egypt is by situating the serial murder case in the context of early interwar uprisings in order to re-examine the relationship between workers and the Egyptian nationalist movement. Existing scholarship about this period grants middle-class nationalists significant agency in working-class

⁸ Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805 - 1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁹ See Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*. See also Wilson Jacob, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870 – 1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse: The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt, 1898-1936* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

mobilizations, without regard for the way in which the wartime economy had altered the relationship between workers and the colonial state and produced widespread anti-colonial sentiment.¹⁰ In Chapter 5, I argue that wartime colonial exploitation had led to the expansion of the informal economy and the subalternization of workers, prompting them to organize in ways that were often less visible and comprehensible to the state than traditional working-class organizing. This subalternization was further reinforced by both colonial and nationalist politics in the early interwar era, which framed all uprisings against the state as nationalist. Chapter 5 analyzes the serial murders in the context of the mass uprisings in Alexandria during this period to shed light on the political economic roots of working-class violence against the colonial state and the petite bourgeoisie. In doing so, I highlight the ways in which workers' interests and grievances both intersected with and diverged from middle-class nationalist interests.

Through these five chapters, I argue that the serial murder case marked the beginning of the end of Alexandria's cosmopolitan landscape. With the end of the war came the hardening of boundaries between workers and the petite bourgeoisie, between masculinity and femininity, and between clandestine sex workers and 'respectable' society. Class, gender and sexuality became central to conceptions of criminality and who was worthy of life and death. The hardening of these boundaries contributed to the formation and empowerment of the Egyptian middle class. At the same time, colonial abuses of Alexandria's porous boundaries contributed to anti-colonial sentiment among workers, bringing working-class concerns in line with nationalist goals. This postwar moment of growing class consciousness was thus simultaneously a moment of growing

¹⁰ See Zachary Lockman, "Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899 - 1914," *Poetics Today* 15:2 (Summer 1994): 157 - 190; see also Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882 - 1954* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988); see also Joel Beinin, "Formation of the Egyptian Working Class," *Merip Reports* 94 (February 1981).

national consciousness. The following chapters will examine how the lives of workers in Alexandria were shaped by World War I and middle class formation, and why class and nation became inseparable.

Chapter 1

The Changing Landscape of an Occupied City: World War I and the Beginning of the End of Cosmopolitan Alexandria

After the murder of Fardūs bint Faḍl Allah in November 1920, al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was taken into police custody. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was a tailor who owned a shop on Anastāsī Street, one of the most popular streets in the al-Labbān district of Alexandria. When asked for witnesses to prove that he was at his shop at the estimated time of Fardūs' murder, he provided the names of several men who owned shops and cafes adjacent to his. Two of the men were European: Leonidas Anastasiou and Mordekhai Greenfeld.¹ Leonidas was a 33-year old man from Cyprus who owned a coffee shop that he operated everyday from 6 am to midnight.² He was identified as an imperial subject [of Britain], what Will Hanley calls 'a second-class foreigner.'³ His fellow business owners on Anastāsī Street usually ordered coffee from him in the mornings, and he told the state prosecutor that he had delivered coffee to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān at his shop on the morning of Fardūs' murder. The second witness, Mordekhai Greenfeld, was a 52-year old Jewish man from Russia who owned a hardware store on Anastāsī Street and was similarly attentive to the whereabouts of his fellow shopkeeper. After ‘Abd al-Raḥmān was taken into custody, Mordekhai approached ‘Abd al-Raḥmān's brother to inquire about his absence, at which point he learned about the rumor of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān's involvement in the sex trade. Mordekhai told the state

¹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina [The File of the Raya and Sakina Case], *Dhākirat Miṣr al-Mu‘āṣara*, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, accessed July 10, 2014, pp. 611. This file is part of a digitization project launched by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and it contains seven hundred and twenty-five pages of investigation records about this case obtained from Dār al-Maḥfūzāt.

² *Ibid.*, 92 - 93.

³ Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria, 1880 - 1914," 293. Imperial subjects were those whose countries had been colonized by Britain or France and who thereby received the same capitulatory privileges as their 'first class' counterparts.

prosecutor that he saw ‘Abd al-Raḥmān at his shop on the afternoon of Fardūs' murder and didn't believe the rumor about him.⁴ The witness testimonies provided by Leonidas and Mordekhai were an essential component of the state prosecutor's decision to exonerate ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.

The visible ethnic diversity and intercommunal interaction of the shopkeepers on Anastāsī Street mirrored the diversity of the residents who lived above their shops. A few months before she was murdered, Fardūs lived above ‘Abd al-Raḥmān's tailor shop along with her British lover, William Golding, who worked for the British Army's base depot in Alexandria.⁵ Fardūs' mother did not seem to have a problem with her daughter's relationship, as she herself had been a Sudanese slave who married a Circassian man in Egypt after slavery was abolished in the 1870s.⁶ Fardūs was known for her unusual amalgamation of Western and traditional dress, particularly her tendency to don a European male sweater over her traditional galabayya.⁷ She was also known to frequent theaters with William in the European district of al-‘Aṭṭārīn in Alexandria, at which point she would wear primarily European clothing.⁸ Fardūs' eclectic appearances and the diverse places she frequented marked the visible fluidity of her gender, class and racial identities - a fluidity which was not uncommon in Alexandria.

Shortly before Fardūs' murder, she moved to a new apartment in al-Labbān a few blocks away from Anastāsī Street. There she became acquainted with her neighbor, Sakina, and together they would walk to ‘Alī Bek al-Kebīr Street to visit Sakina's sister, Raya. Raya's home

⁴ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 93 - 94.

⁵ Ibid., 187 - 188.

⁶ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 511.

⁷ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 440.

⁸ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 514.

functioned as a meeting place for many people in al-Labbān. Part home, part brothel, it was a fluid space where streetwalkers took clients they solicited in crowded marketplaces, where translators known as dragomans brought sailors to sleep with Raya's underage sex workers, and where neighborhood toughs known as the *fitiwwa* met with their lovers. Raya's home welcomed both workers and lower middle class women who struggled to survive the unprecedented rise in the cost of living during World War I. It was a place where people of diverse social and occupational backgrounds mingled, including day laborers, shopkeepers, bar owners, street peddlers, landowners, domestic servants, sex workers and managers at the port. Raya herself was particularly adept at socializing with petit bourgeois women in the marketplace and recruiting them to work in her brothel. Fardūs found that she fit in well with Raya and Sakina's crowd, and not realizing that this crowd had been involved in the murder of sixteen women before her, she began to visit the home regularly until it became the site of her murder. Fardūs became the last victim of the 1920 Alexandria serial murders, a case that is widely known throughout the Middle East today as "Raya and Sakina."

In many ways, the visible diversity, mobility and fluidity of identities in the predominantly working-class district of al-Labbān during the early interwar period represents a subaltern cosmopolitanism in Alexandria that historians often encounter through legal narratives of violence. The applicability of the concept of cosmopolitanism to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Alexandria has been the subject of a longstanding debate among scholars of modern Egypt. Khaled Fahmy and Hala Halim have critiqued the traditional narratives of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism as an elite and colonial discourse predicated on the historical erasure of natives and their contributions to Alexandria's past, despite the fact that they

constituted at least 80% of the population in Alexandria throughout the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.⁹ Building on these critiques, Hanley has argued for the need to focus on non-elite experiences of cosmopolitanism and has coined the term "vulgar cosmopolitanism" in an attempt to challenge elite, Orientalist nostalgia about a more tolerant and predominantly European past in Alexandria. Through his study of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century consular court cases from al-Labbān, Alexandria, Hanley shifts the discussion of the subaltern experience of cosmopolitanism away from traditional categories of nationality, sect, language and class towards new social categories such as "alcohol drinker, cafe goer, curser and accursed ... newcomer and native ...".¹⁰ Although Hanley's focus on consular court records inadvertently centers Europeans in his discussion of "vulgar cosmopolitanism," his search for new social boundaries pushes the concept of cosmopolitanism beyond its traditionally elite and Eurocentric framework.

The above narrative about Fardūs and her murder builds on Hanley's attempt to forge a new discourse about cosmopolitanism that encompasses the experience of subalterns in Alexandria. Although cosmopolitanism in al-Labbān included interactions that crossed the boundaries of nationality, language and class, such as the interaction between ‘Abd al-Raḥmān and his fellow European shopkeepers on Anastāsī Street and the interactions between workers and the petit bourgeoisie in Raya's home and brothel, cosmopolitanism is defined by more than the crossing of social boundaries. And while the fluidity of Fardūs' intersecting identities may have been the product of a cosmopolitan worldview, this chapter shifts the discussion of

⁹ See Fahmy, "For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor, 263 - 280; See also Hala Halim, *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (Oxford: Fordham University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Hanley, *Foreignness and Localness*, 33.

subaltern cosmopolitanism away from the individual and onto the landscape.¹¹ To create a framework for discussing the cosmopolitan landscape of al-Labbān, this chapter borrows elements of Malte Fuhrmann's definition of cosmopolitanism as discussed in Athanasios Gekas' work. These elements include visible diversity, the ability to navigate 'different coded spheres,' and intercommunal sociability.¹² Raya's ability to comfortably navigate middle class and working-class spaces, Fardūs' ability to comfortably navigate native and European spaces, and the ability of European soldiers and sailors to find hidden clandestine brothels in native quarters was the norm rather than the exception, and it set Alexandria apart from Cairo. It is also what made sex work in al-Labbān particularly widespread and profitable. Thus, what marked al-Labbān as a cosmopolitan landscape was not the fact that nearly 30% of its population were foreigners by 1917, but rather the structures put in place that enabled people to socialize across community boundaries and navigate 'different coded spheres' - the bustling marketplaces, the clandestine brothels, the bars, the dragomen, the high population turnover due to the availability of seasonal work and the accessibility of short-term housing. The structure of this port city made the frequent crossing of social boundaries and the fluidity of identities a necessity for survival. Cosmopolitanism was thus the product of a structurally induced porosity in communal and individual boundaries.

Yet the permeability of social boundaries in Alexandria was neither constant nor complete, and there were moments in which the hardening of these boundaries produced violent

¹¹ For more discussion of cosmopolitan worldviews in the Middle East, including Sufism, see Sami Zubaida, "Middle Eastern Experiences of Cosmopolitanism," in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (New York: Oxford, 2008), 32 - 41.

¹² Athanasios (Sakis) Gekas, "Class and Cosmopolitanism: The Historiographical Fortunes of Merchants in Eastern Mediterranean Ports," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 24:2 (2009): 102.

interactions. In May 1921, immediately after the suspects in the Alexandria serial murder case were put on trial, Anastāsī Street became one of many sites of intense rioting in Alexandria. As later chapters will show, while the violence of the serial murders was produced along the lines of gender and sexuality, the violence of the riots was produced along the lines of race and class. These moments of violence were not unique in Alexandria's history, and the city experienced several major riots during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹³ Yet the May 1921 riots were more intense and widespread than previous riots in Alexandria, and they were accompanied by smaller-scale riots in Cairo.¹⁴ Daniel Woodward's recent M.A. thesis on this topic uses these riots to argue that cosmopolitanism in Alexandria is "a flawed tool of analysis" which "precludes any real understanding of the ways in which power, exploitation, and class actually function in human societies."¹⁵ While Woodward provides a strong critique of the ways in which the discourse about Alexandrian cosmopolitanism has been used to mask colonial realities and class exploitation, the abuse of the concept of cosmopolitanism does not negate the fact that as a port city intimately connected to a Mediterranean world through trade networks, Alexandria was shaped by a mobility and fluidity that was not characteristic of more inland cities. Placing Alexandria in its regional Mediterranean context reveals that cosmopolitanism and

¹³ Besides the well-known 'Urābī Revolt of 1881 - 1882, there were many local riots in Alexandria, usually in subaltern neighborhoods. For discussion of a riot on al-Saba' Banāt Street in 1901, see Taqrīr min Ḍubbāṭ al-Jaysh al-Ingilīzī bi Caracol al-'Aṭṭārīn bil-Iskandirayya 'an Wugūd Ishtibakāt [Report from the British Army at the 'Aṭṭārīn Police Station Concerning Riots], Cabinet of Overseers and Ministers, Egyptian National Archives. For discussion of a riot in 1911, see, "Alexandria Riot," HC Deb 20 November 1911, vol 31, col 798. Robert Ilbert mentions that there was an acute economic crisis in Alexandria in 1911. See Robert Ilbert, *Alexandrie 1830 - 1930: Histoire d'une Communauté Citadine* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1996), 372. The role of economic concerns in these riots is understudied and will be taken up in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ *al-Ahrām*, May 20 - 23, 1921.

¹⁵ Daniel Woodward, "Hats and Tarbooshes: Identity, Cosmopolitanism, and Violence in 1920s Alexandria" (MA thesis, American University in Cairo, 2014), 16. In his final chapter, Woodward also argues that the fluidity of identities in Alexandria problematizes the concept of cosmopolitanism. Yet I am arguing that this fluidity is precisely what made Alexandria cosmopolitan.

colonialism were not mutually exclusive, and the visible diversity in Alexandria at this time was not solely attributable to colonial exploitation. The problem that Woodward identifies is thus not inherent to the concept of a cosmopolitan landscape but rather to the way in which elite and colonial narratives of cosmopolitanism have been deployed.

Although violent moments punctuated the cosmopolitan landscape of many Mediterranean port cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,¹⁶ the tripartite violence of the 1920 serial murders, the criminal proceedings that led to the execution of six suspects, and the subsequent riots of May 1921 indicate that the early interwar period marked a transitional moment in the history of Alexandria. This local violence was foregrounded in a series of nationalist uprisings and financial crises that brought the Alexandria Municipal Council under the control of the central state and culminated in a semi-independent Egypt in 1922.¹⁷ While most historical literature traces the end of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism to President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser's nationalization of foreign-owned property in the 1960s and the subsequent flight of Europeans from Alexandria,¹⁸ this study argues that cosmopolitanism is defined by the permeability of social boundaries between diverse communities rather than simply

¹⁶ See Gekas, "Class and Cosmopolitanism," 103, which references riots at different points in time in Smyrna, Odessa, Corfu, Thessalonica, and Alexandria; See also Panos Hatziprokopiou, "Haunted by the Past and the Ambivalences of the Present: Immigration and Thessalonica's Second Path to Cosmopolitanism," in *Post-cosmopolitan Cities: Explorations of Urban Coexistence*, eds. Caroline Humphrey and Vera Skvirskaja (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 197.

¹⁷ See Robert Ilbert, "A Certain Sense of Citizenship," in *Alexandria 1860 - 1960: The Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, ed. Robert Ilbert and Ilios Yannakakis, trans. Colin Clement (Alexandria: Harpocrates Publishing, 1997), 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

the presence of Europeans.¹⁹ As the final chapter of this study will show, despite the continued prominence of European communities in interwar Alexandria, the effects of wartime colonial policies on the political economy of Alexandria contributed to the production of increasingly rigid social boundaries. What brought an end to cosmopolitan Alexandria was thus not the flight of foreigners during the Nasser era but rather the hardening of social boundaries along the lines of nation, race, class, gender and sexuality during the interwar period.

The nature of the tripartite violence of 1920-21 reveals that the increasing rigidity of social boundaries was an essential component of the struggle for political and economic power after the war. Social boundaries were the means by which power was simultaneously constructed, exercised and resisted, and maintaining these boundaries became a priority in light of increased contact between diverse social groups both during and after WWI. Although much scholarly attention has been given to the rise of Egyptian nationalism in the early interwar period, nationality was neither the most salient nor the most significant social boundary in Alexandria at this time. The fluid boundary between the petite bourgeoisie and workers in Alexandria became the primary concern of both the Egyptian middle class and the colonial state in the early interwar period. The growing power of the Egyptian middle class was exercised through the policing of this boundary, and thus the violence of 1920-21 was a product of attempts by both state and social actors to gain control over Alexandria's fluid spaces. As

¹⁹ Fahmy argues that the destruction of cosmopolitanism in Alexandria may be traced to the rise of Fascism, Nazism, Communism, Zionism and Greek irredentism in the 1930s and 40s. See Fahmy, "For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor," 278. One might also argue that the spread of nationalist education among European communities in Alexandria in the 1920s played a significant role in this destruction. See Michael Haag, *Vintage Alexandria: Photographs of the City 1860 - 1960* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 61, which features a picture from the 1920s of a classroom in the Regie Scuole Italiane in Alexandria. Ironically, although the caption states that all ethnicities were welcome in Alexandria's foreign schools, the writing on the chalkboard in the picture states in Italian, "O sun you cannot see anything more grand and more beautiful than Italy and Rome," highlighting the way in which nationalist ideas had begun to reshape foreign education in Alexandria during the interwar period.

subsequent chapters will show, it was the early interwar struggle to control Alexandria's porous landscape through the construction and policing of physical and discursive boundaries that marked the beginning of the end of cosmopolitan Alexandria.

This chapter begins the story of Alexandria's changing social landscape with an analysis of the effects of World War I on both the socioeconomic and political structure of the port city. I argue that the hardening of social boundaries in interwar Alexandria had its roots in wartime policies adopted by the colonial state in Egypt for the purpose of funding the war. Prior to World War I, Alexandria maintained a certain degree of autonomy within the colonial state due to the diverse and powerful business interests that controlled the city.²⁰ The imposition of martial law in Egypt in 1914 fundamentally altered the relationship between Alexandria and the central state, enabling colonial forces to centralize the economy by implementing a number of policies to control the movement of people and goods for the war effort. This included transporting unemployed native men back to their villages or forcing them to join the British Army's Egyptian Labor Corps, drastically reducing foreign trade, requisitioning food supplies, and banning the export of gold. Wartime colonial policies led to the growth of the petite bourgeoisie and the increasing informalization of labor, making the navigation of Alexandria's fluid spaces a necessity for survival, particularly for women in the working-class district of al-Labbān. Thus, clandestine activities proliferated in al-Labbān's bustling marketplaces and in private homes as subalterns searched for ways to channel resources from elites and colonial forces to their families. This chapter examines the countervailing dynamics of state control and subaltern

²⁰ Ibid., 30 -31.

survival strategies in al-Labbān, and how the struggle for control over the movement of people and goods laid the foundation for the violence of 1920-21.

al-Labbān's Structurally Induced Porosity

As Egypt's main port city, Alexandria's physical and social landscape was defined by mobility and fluctuation, and a large percentage of the population was frequently in motion. These dynamics were even more salient in the district of al-Labbān, whose proximity to both the port and Alexandria's main railway station ensured a steady influx of migrants and mobile workers, including sailors, soldiers, and peasants in search of seasonal employment opportunities. As Hanley notes, al-Labbān's main street, al-Saba‘ Banāt, led to the port, inviting newcomers with limited financial resources into its bars, cafes and brothels.²¹ Alexandria's extensive tramway network, established in the 1860s and indicated below by the red and blue lines, also brought migrants directly from the railway station into al-Labbān.



Figure 1.1: Map of Alexandria showing al-Saba‘ Banāt Street and the railway station (highlighted in green)

²¹ Hanley, *Foreignness and Localness*, 35.

Given that more than half of Egypt's foreign trade went through Alexandria,²² both natives and Europeans saw the port city as a land of opportunity.²³ For native migrants, Alexandria's seasonal work opportunities were integrally tied to the agricultural economy of the Egyptian countryside and the global market for cotton. Rural migrants followed the flow of cotton from southern villages to the northern city of Alexandria after the cotton harvesting season, where they worked in cotton gins and cotton presses, and prepared the cotton to be shipped abroad.²⁴ Large numbers of European migrants also arrived in Alexandria at this time and some competed with native migrants for factory jobs.²⁵ Although the district of Mīnā' al-Baṣal was best known for its cotton presses,²⁶ these factories extended into the neighboring district of al-Labbān as well (see map below). Sakina's third husband, Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Āl, worked at cotton factories in both Mīnā' al-Baṣal and al-Labbān, frequently altering his living accommodations so he could sleep close to his workplace.²⁷ In addition to the money Muḥammad made from working in the cotton industry, he and other migratory peasants would also bring fresh produce and dairy products

²² See Ministry of Finance, Statistical Department, *Annual Return of Shipping, Cargo and Passenger Traffic in the Ports of Egypt and Suez Canal Transits, 1924* (Cairo: Government Press, 1925), Maṭbū'āt Section of Egyptian National Archives, which provides both pre-war and post-war statistics showing that the number of commercial steamships and registered tonnage going through Alexandria was double that of the Suez and Port Said combined.

²³ See Fahmy, "Towards a Social History of Modern Alexandria," 281 - 306.

²⁴ Janet Abu-Lughod, "Migrant Adjustment to City Life: The Egyptian Case," *American Journal of Sociology* 67:1 (1961): 22 - 33.

²⁵ See Ministry of Finance, *Annual Return of Shipping*, which shows that the largest number of European migrants arrived in Alexandria in September/October, after the cotton harvesting season. Ilbert notes that there was tension between European and native migrants because the latter were seen as cheap labor. See Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 375. However, other sources suggest that factory labor in Alexandria was often racially segregated, with Greek workers gravitating towards the cigarette industry and Italian workers gravitating towards construction. See Haag, *Vintage Alexandria*, 69 and Muhammad Awad, *Italy in Alexandria: Influences on the Built Environment* (Alexandria: Alexandria Preservation Trust, 2008). Given that 1920-21 was a bad year for cotton crops in Egypt and the rate of unemployment was high among native subalterns, the racial segregation of factory labor likely contributed to the outbreak of riots in al-Labbān.

²⁶ See 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 91; See also Dina Mamdouh Nassar, Shahira Sharaf Eldin, "A New Life for the Industrial Heritage of Minet El-Bassal at Alexandria," *Journal of Heritage Conservation* 33 (2013): 23 - 31.

²⁷ 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 93.

from their home villages to sell in Alexandria's marketplace.²⁸ While some peasants returned to their villages after the cotton season, others such as Raya's husband Ḥasab Allah decided to make Alexandria their permanent residence, spending most of the year working as day laborers at the port and sending money back to their families on a regular basis.

In addition to migrant workers and day laborers, a large percentage of al-Labbān's residents were street peddlers and shopkeepers of various nationalities. The majority of street peddlers were women, resulting in a gendered division of labor in which most native men worked in structured environments while most native women made a living by roaming the streets. Many female street peddlers in al-Labbān such as Sakina and a number of the serial murder victims were also known to simultaneously engage in streetwalking, particularly during periods of economic crisis. The mobility of al-Labbān's street peddlers and their frequent encounters with newcomers kept many spaces within al-Labbān fluid and porous. Al-Labbān's markets were an especially popular meeting point for people of various social classes who lived both inside and outside the neighborhood. The two most popular markets were Sūq al-Gum‘a (the Friday market) and Sūq al-Aḥad (the Sunday market), which coincided with religious days of observance and days of rest from work.²⁹ These crowded and bustling markets offered street peddlers and other independent sellers a chance to buy, sell and exchange their produce and wares at low costs. They also offered the anonymity and lack of transparency that clandestine sex workers and streetwalkers needed to solicit clients, thereby serving a valuable economic interest in blurring the boundaries of respectability. The markets were thus in close proximity to a

²⁸ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 293.

²⁹ Ibid., 430.

number of red light districts in al-Labbān, and it was in Sūq al-Gum‘a that Raya and Sakina established their most successful clandestine brothel during the war.³⁰

To accommodate the cyclical influx of migrants and the steady flow of immigrants, large sections of al-Labbān were dedicated to short-term, low-income housing. In European quarters, low-income housing was provided in tenements called *okelles*.³¹ In Arab quarters, the majority of housing for the poor was located on waqf territory, which were religious endowments to be used for charitable purposes under Islamic law. Waqf founders would appoint a *nāzīr*, or administrator, to maintain their property and rent it to poor families. In al-Labbān, a number of waqf administrators were women, such as Amīna bint Mansūr, one of the suspects in the 1920 Alexandria serial murders, and Laṭīfa al-Gamāl, the administrator of the waqf property in which the first serial murder victim was found.³² Waqf properties usually housed anyone who was struggling to find work, including refugees, migrants, and recent immigrants, along with the sick, the aging, and the disabled. To further increase the affordability of housing and the availability of short-term accommodations, waqf administrators frequently allowed primary renters to sublet the rooms of their home to other individuals or families. Thus, one would often find several families sharing a single four-bedroom apartment in al-Labbān, with subletters frequently moving from one room to another in search of a better living arrangement.

The large influx of poor families into al-Labbān in the early twentieth century due to the growing impoverishment of Egyptian peasants put a strain on housing and resulted in the

³⁰ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 149. See Chapter 2 for further discussion of Raya and Sakina's wartime business ventures in Alexandria's sex trade.

³¹ Myron Echenberg, *Plague Ports: The Global Urban Impact of Bubonic Plague, 1894 - 1901* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007), 90.

³² ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 63 and 214.

proliferation of makeshift homes called *hishash*.³³ These makeshift homes were frequently found on the outskirts of districts and in close proximity to factories. The highest concentration of *hishash* was in al-Labbān, particularly near cotton factories, and their growth was haphazard and defied any attempts at central planning. The minutes of the Alexandria Municipal Council meetings frequently referenced the housing crisis and the proliferation of *hishash* in poor neighborhoods, which were seen as a risk to both public health and security.³⁴ In an attempt to create more affordable housing for impoverished families during the war, the khedive mandated a ten percent reduction in the price of waqf property.³⁵ While al-Labbān did not have the largest percentage of residents in early twentieth-century Alexandria, its rental situation made certain sections of the district some of the densest areas of the city. The maps below compare sections of al-Labbān to sections of Alexandria's most European district, al-‘Aṭṭārīn, to highlight the disparity in the physical structure and density of the neighborhoods.

³³ Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 525. For a picture of *hishash* in al-Labbān, see page 823. For a discussion of *okelles*, see Echenberg, *Plague Ports*, 90.

³⁴ Ville d'Alexandrie, Séance de la Commission Municipale du 9 Juin 1920, Maṭbū‘āt Section of Egyptian National Archives.

³⁵ "A Generous Sultan: Money for the Needy: Reduction of Rents," *The Egyptian Gazette*, Jan 28, 1915, page 4.



Sections of al-Labban highlighted in red and blue; sections of al-Attarin highlighted in orange and green



Cotton press factory in al-Labban at bottom of map

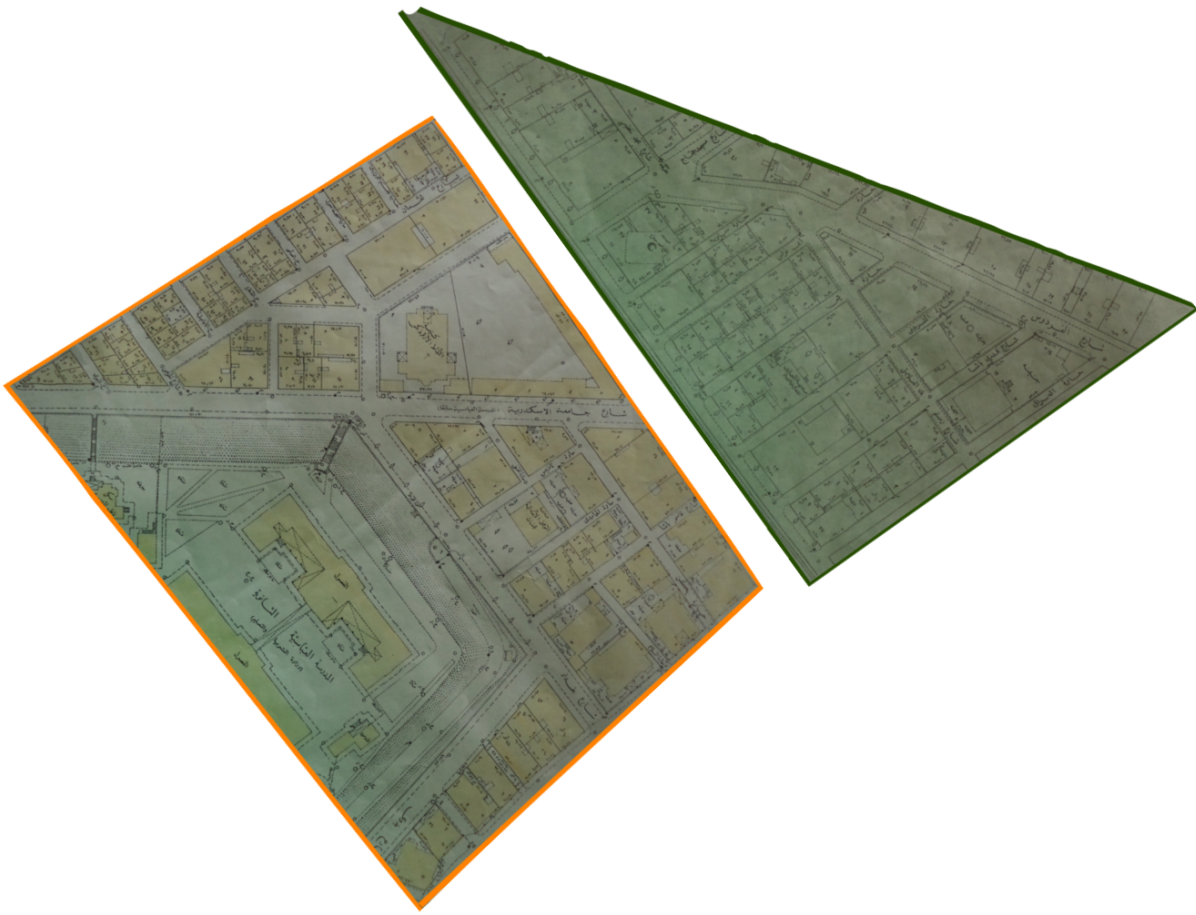


Figure 1.2: Map of Alexandria with enlarged sections of al-Labbān (highlighted in red and blue) and enlarged sections of al-‘Atṭārīn (highlighted in orange and green)³⁶

In contrast to al-‘Atṭārīn's wide, evenly lined streets and spacious homes, al-Labbān's jagged streets and narrow alleyways were filled with cramped living quarters spawned by the rapid and unregulated expansion of low-income housing. Although al-‘Atṭārīn housed the largest number of Europeans in Alexandria, al-Labbān was also home to a large number of European workers and shopkeepers who at times lived in the same buildings as native workers. By 1917,

³⁶ The first map was produced in 1960 and was photographed at the Rare Books Library at American University in Cairo. Subsequent maps were produced in the interwar period and were photographed at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

the percentage of foreigners in al-Labbān had grown to 29% of the district's population,³⁷ highlighting the importance of theorizing Alexandria at the intersection of race and class. Many European shopkeepers who worked and resided in al-Labbān usually made more money than their native counterparts and could afford to rent an entire apartment for their family rather than living in a tenement or subletting a room in a home. Thus, in the waqf building in which Sakina lived, the floor above her was rented to a Greek shopkeeper and his family who could afford the privilege of having no subletters.³⁸ As the final chapter of this dissertation will show, the influx of foreigners into al-Labbān's low-income quarters both during and after the war constituted a form of gentrification that sparked tensions along the lines of race and class, contributing to the May 1921 riots.

As the population of foreigners in al-Labbān steadily rose in the early twentieth century, so did the population of Ṣaʿīdīs. Ṣaʿīdī was the name given to people from Upper Egypt (known as the Ṣaʿīd in Arabic), which comprised the southern half of Egypt. In many ways, Ṣaʿīdīs constituted a distinct community in Alexandria at this time. They spoke a different dialect than local Alexandrians, they dressed differently, they had darker skin, and they frequently held low-paying jobs in the cotton industry. The socioeconomic marginalization of Ṣaʿīdīs in Alexandria stemmed from the economic marginalization of Upper Egypt in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which was exacerbated by increased capitalist exploitation under British colonial rule.³⁹ During the colonial period, the economic marginalization of the Ṣaʿīd was reinforced by a

³⁷ Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 797.

³⁸ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 199.

³⁹ See Peter Gran, "Upper Egypt in Modern History: A 'Southern' Question?" in *Upper Egypt: Identity and Change*, ed. Nicolas Hopkins and Reem Saad (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 79 - 96; See also Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Imagined Empires: A History of Revolt in Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013).

racialized discourse that produced the Ṣaʿīdī as an internal Other and embedded him onto the urban landscape as a paradoxical figure of belonging/unbelonging. Feeble-minded, lustful, hot-tempered, and vengeful, the Ṣaʿīdī was the always-already failed object of modern reforms.⁴⁰ Even as Ṣaʿīdīs crossed regional boundaries and migrated from Upper Egypt into the urban quarters of Cairo and Alexandria, they were believed to have retained their essentialized Ṣaʿīdī characteristics, and this difference became naturalized as a permanent feature of both their identity and the spaces they inhabited. This racialization of Ṣaʿīdīs was rooted in their position as dispensable labor in the political economy of cotton, and thus they were frequently relegated to the margins of the urban landscape both socially and economically, living mostly in *hishash* and the cramped quarters of al-Labbān.

While the regular movement of migrants through al-Labbān contributed to the porosity of its physical and social landscape, the formation of communities with defined boundaries was a necessity for the survival of its permanent residents. Community structures were particularly important in Alexandria, where the relative absence of strong central state control during the colonial period enabled the emergence of powerful community leaders at the level of both municipal and local governance.⁴¹ Communities in Alexandria were expected to assist their members in times of need and protect them from abuses of state and social power. For example, most ethnic communities in Alexandria had their own benevolent societies to assist the poor,

⁴⁰ See Martina Rieker, "Reading the Colonial Archive," in *New Frontiers in the Social History of the Middle East*, ed. Enid Hill (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 134 - 161; See also Catherine Miller, "Upper Egyptian Regionally Based Communities in Cairo: Traditional or Modern Forms of Urbanization?," in *Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East*, ed. Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006), 375 - 398.

⁴¹ Ilbert, "A Certain Sense of Citizenship," 30 - 31.

which were partially funded by the municipality.⁴² Resources thus flowed from the municipal government to the population through community institutions. European communities in Alexandria also received additional legal and financial protection through capitulations, which granted them immunity from both taxation and Egyptian law, enabling them to accumulate the financial capital and legal privilege necessary to build strong communities.⁴³ The strength of Alexandria's diverse communities thus rested on both the permeability to accommodate newcomers and the stability to protect residents.

While Ṣaʿīdīs were lumped into the undifferentiated, state-constructed category of "local subjects," they lived within their own fluid community structures in Alexandria, often linked by place of origin. Certain quarters of al-Labbān were occupied primarily by Ṣaʿīdīs, the most popular one known as Ḥāret al-Farahda⁴⁴ (located to the right of the blue area on the map above). Unlike white subalterns in Egypt who were formally protected by the capitulations, native subalterns in Egyptian cities relied on neighborhood toughs known as the *fitiwwa* to protect them financially and to arbitrate disputes.⁴⁵ In Ṣaʿīdī quarters, immigrants worked their way into the ranks of the *fitiwwa* by winning street battles, particularly in Ḥāret al-Farahda.⁴⁶ This was the means by which two men from a village in Asyūt, Aḥmad al-Gidr and ʿUrābī Hassān, became the

⁴² Baladiyyat al-Iskandirayya, *Taqrīr al-Mudīr al-ʿĀm ʿala Mashrūʿ Mizāniyyat ʿĀm 1919 - 1920* [Alexandria Municipality, *The General Manager's Report on the 1919 - 1920 Budget*], 36 - 38, Alexandria Municipal Library. This budget lists over fifty benevolent societies, the majority of them connected to a particular ethnic community.

⁴³ Capitulations were granted to the majority of Europeans in the Ottoman Empire. For further information on the capitulations from the perspective of international law, see Eliana Augusti, "From Capitulations to Unequal Treaties: The Matter of an Extraterritorial Jurisdiction in the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Civil Law Studies*, 4:2 (2011): 285 - 307.

⁴⁴ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 109.

⁴⁵ The *fitiwwa* will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

⁴⁶ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 109.

fitiwwa of their neighborhood, Gnaynat al-‘Uyūnī. Aḥmad al-Gidr eventually became a manager at the port, which gave him control over a large number of workers and bolstered his position in the community.⁴⁷ The capitulations thus empowered the *fitiwwa* by increasing the importance of socioeconomic protection in native subaltern communities, and this empowerment in turn enabled the *fitiwwa* to control people's access to jobs and material resources.

For many Ṣa‘īdīs in Alexandria, joining the ranks of the *fitiwwa* was one of the only means of social mobility. In contrast to many native-born Alexandrians who owned the products of their labor, Ṣa‘īdīs often lacked the resources to start their own businesses and were consequently relegated to an underclass of dispensable labor dependent on highly unstable seasonal work in the cotton industry. The absence of stable material resources in Ṣa‘īdī communities contributed to tensions between newcomers and permanent residents. Poor newcomers were frequently disempowered within these community structures and exploited by their more urbanized peers. Both Aḥmad al-Gidr and ‘Urābī Hassān used to publicly shame and harass Raya for purchasing horse meat from the Municipal Council during the war (known at that time as "English meat"),⁴⁸ which was considered a symbol of poverty. ‘Urābī would also regularly abuse Raya and her sex workers in exchange for providing protection.⁴⁹ Gaining acceptance into the Ṣa‘īdī community was sometimes a challenge for newcomers, and at times they found it easier to gain this acceptance through gendered networks of solidarity among local Alexandrians. Sakina's best friends, Zannūba the chicken dealer and Maryam the café owner, were both born and raised in Alexandria, and Raya and Sakina's business partner, Amīna bint

⁴⁷ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 201.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 371.

Mansūr, was also a local Alexandrian woman.⁵⁰ Tensions between newcomers and residents thus pushed newcomers to the margins of their communities, encouraging the cultivation of other forms of solidarity that cut across community boundaries.

The tension between Raya, Aḥmad and ‘Urābī also highlight the ways in which social status in subaltern communities was defined by a variety of factors, including wealth, occupation, land ownership, clothing, and food. While ‘Urābī was a day laborer at the port, he also allegedly came from a landowning family in Asyūt, leaving the land to his sisters after the death of his father.⁵¹ He therefore considered himself a person of higher social standing than Raya based on his family history. Aḥmad also claimed to be a member of a higher social class on the basis of his managerial position at the port.⁵² However, his daughter simultaneously worked as a domestic servant, suggesting that his income was insufficient to support his family.⁵³ While neither Aḥmad nor ‘Urābī could be considered members of the Egyptian elite or middle class, they had greater socioeconomic power than Raya's family, which they identified as a status differential. Social status was thus defined not only by income or occupation but also by a confluence of factors including family origins, potential access to material resources, and the ability to exercise social control.

While communities had an inherent interest in maintaining their boundaries to control the flow of resources, the intersecting relationships of power within communities and the marginalization of newcomers made cross-communal solidarities a necessity for survival. These

⁵⁰ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 67; ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 178.

⁵¹ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 170.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵³ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 584.

dynamics became more pronounced during World War I as refugees arrived into Alexandria from neighboring regions and the distribution of resources among the population became contingent on the needs of the British Army. The colonial state's restructuring of Alexandria's economy to serve British military interests resulted in the displacement of workers in particular industries and the formation of new socioeconomic networks, contributing to the expansion of the informal economy and the proliferation of fluid spaces in al-Labbān. At the same time, these wartime policies fundamentally altered the relationship between communities and the municipal government, as well as the relationship between the municipal government and the colonial state, laying the foundation for increased state and social control over the activities and mobility of workers.

Wartime Crises and Economic Restructuring

At the beginning of World War I, Sakina and her second husband, Aḥmad Ragab, arrived in Alexandria in search of work. They had met at a hospital in Tanta, where Sakina had been detained for venereal disease treatment while working in a brothel. After her release from the hospital, they migrated north to Alexandria with hopes for a better life.⁵⁴ Due to a series of cotton crises in the Egyptian countryside as well as aggressive wartime tax-collecting policies adopted by the colonial state,⁵⁵ many more rural migrants arrived in Alexandria over the next couple of years, including Sakina's sister, Raya and her husband, Ḥasab Allah. They were accompanied by waves of refugees from neighboring countries, most notably Jews and Christians from Syria and

⁵⁴ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina [The Raya and Sakina Case], National Judicial Studies Center in Cairo, Egypt, microfilm, 705.

⁵⁵ Laṭīfa Muḥammad Sālim, *Miṣr fil-Ḥarb al-‘Ālamiyya al-’Ūla* [Egypt During World War I] (Cairo: Egyptian Book Organization, 1984), 103 - 118.

Palestine escaping the increasingly aggressive nationalist policies of the Ottoman state during the war.⁵⁶ Alexandria had long been known as a safe haven and land of opportunity, and it was the destination of choice for those looking to escape hardship.

Yet the war unleashed a series of economic consequences that workers in Egypt had not anticipated. The British Army monopolized shipping routes in Egypt for military purposes, causing a significant reduction in foreign trade throughout the war years.⁵⁷ Port statistics for the period between 1913 and 1924 reveal that trade in Alexandria did not begin to approach pre-war levels again until 1920:

⁵⁶ See "The Flight from Syria: Refugees Escorted by Australian Troops," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 8, 1915, page 3; "Alexandria Refugees: Removal from Metropole Hotel," January 13, 1915, page 3; and "Refugees at Alexandria: Position of the Jewish Community," January 14, 1915, page 3. See also "The Refugee Problem: An Official Committee Meeting at Alexandria," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 29, 1915, page 5 for discussion about the establishment of a committee to deal with the refugee problem in Alexandria.

⁵⁷ Ilbert shows that foreign trade in Alexandria during the war was at its lowest point since 1864. See Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 771.

سنوات YEARS.	الحركة التجارية في الموانئ الرئيسية.—Traffic in the Principal Ports.					
	المجموع Total.		الاسكندرية Alexandria.		بور سعيد.—Port Said.	
	عدد السفن Number of ships.	الحوالة الرسمية Registered Tonnage (1)	عدد السفن Number of Ships.	الحوالة الرسمية Registered Tonnage (1)	عدد السفن Number of Ships.	الحوالة الرسمية Registered Tonnage (1)
						السفن التي لم تمر قناة السويس Non-transiting Suez Canal.
						السفن Sum of Sh.
السفن التجارية Commercial Steamships.						
1913	3,255	5,620,264	1,932	3,718,650	922	1,620,620
1914	2,847	5,099,053	1,657	3,299,099	782	1,457,579
1915	1,478	2,210,548	958	1,576,756	285	375,051
1916	955	1,456,151	551	966,673	138	155,224
1917	804	1,274,215	316	641,060	119	132,958
1918	753	1,342,973	330	738,062	96	147,427
1919	1,364	2,220,904	726	1,330,702	316	420,965
1920	2,250	3,932,256	1,242	2,527,436	624	817,485
1921	2,521	4,304,669	1,468	2,776,193	626	1,030,331
1922	2,568	4,619,716	1,574	3,107,966	565	1,042,962
1923	2,647	5,101,163	1,766	3,729,146	523	981,526
1924	2,846	5,763,595	1,881	4,206,769	565	1,139,650
السفن الحربية والنقلات (2) Warships and Transports.						
1914	187	1,088,430	93	662,658	35	109,481
1915	1,762	10,748,835	1,285	8,438,859	172	612,575
1916	1,895	9,777,545	1,283	6,792,115	189	519,039
1917	1,501	6,496,666	766	3,336,644	292	527,268
1918	1,942	7,338,737	759	3,482,653	529	1,151,876
1919	1,050	3,588,825	384	1,799,433	428	972,683
1920	299	1,052,458	132	562,298	82	208,424
1921	97	300,362	44	117,397	3	12,978
1922	34	474,523	17	118,297	—	—
1923	30	416,763	14	63,808	9	20,297
1924	16	79,423	8	49,426	—	—

Figure 1.3: Table of the number of ships and tonnage arriving at the port of Alexandria between 1913 and 1924⁵⁸

Given that the majority of industries in Alexandria were tied to the global market, workers' lives became increasingly precarious during the war. The number of jobs in factories and in the cotton industry decreased dramatically, resulting in a stark rise in the number of servants and day laborers in Alexandria.⁵⁹ As migrants and seasonal workers whose livelihood was dependent on

⁵⁸ Table taken from Ministry of Finance, *Annual Return of Shipping*, 3.

⁵⁹ See Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 784. Between 1907 and 1917, the percentage of people employed in the agricultural sector decreased by over 6%, while the number of day laborers and domestic servants increased by over 10%.

the production and export of cotton, Şa‘īdī men were particularly affected by these wartime transformations. In September 1914, an Alexandria-based newspaper reported that the municipal government was forcing many unemployed Şa‘īdīs to return to their villages, even going so far as to purchase railway tickets for them.⁶⁰ The newspaper simultaneously called on the government to send these Şa‘īdīs to the Suez Canal Zone town of Ismailia, where the presence of the British Army produced a greater demand for labor.⁶¹ Some Şa‘īdī men such as Aḥmad Ragab heeded these calls and began working as manual laborers for the British Army in order to avoid repatriation.⁶² The longstanding precarity experienced by migrants and seasonal workers increased significantly during the war, leaving the livelihood of many Şa‘īdīs dependent on their provision of services to the British Army. The surplus population that had been created by European capitalist exploitation in Egypt in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus became exploitable labor for the British Army during World War I.

The 40% reduction in foreign trade in 1915 made jobs increasingly scarce not only for factory workers, but also for dock and transport workers. In response, the Municipal Council attempted to create jobs for the unemployed through a number of public works projects.⁶³ Although these projects provided temporary employment for workers who met select criteria, they were frequently interrupted by wartime exigencies. The halt in foreign trade also led to a substantial rise in the cost of cement as well as a substantial decline in its quality, which made

⁶⁰ *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 2, 1914, 2.

⁶¹ *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 4, 1914, 4.

⁶² Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 705.

⁶³ *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 1, 1915, 3.

these projects a seemingly unwise use of resources.⁶⁴ Due to these wartime realities, the Alexandria municipality decided to stop funding public works projects during the second half of the war, leaving workers with few alternatives besides working for the British Army.

The precarity induced by the war also affected those who were involved in the production and sale of food. While much literature exists on the famine that affected millions in Syria during World War I and its role in the subsequent formation of the Middle East Supply Center (MESOC) during World War II,⁶⁵ the hardship caused by wartime food crises in Egypt has received less attention from historians. To provide food and transportation for soldiers on the Middle Eastern front during World War I, the British Army requisitioned grain, camels and donkeys, forcing peasants in Egypt to sell their produce and transport animals at prices below market value. Large landowners often succeeded in avoiding these requisition orders, placing the burden of funding the war effort primarily on peasants.⁶⁶ This resulted in food shortages and caused great hardship for peasants who simultaneously struggled with increased tax burdens during the war, thereby contributing to rural-urban migration and the dislocation of the peasantry.

Although historians have argued that food was not in short supply in Egypt during World War I,⁶⁷ sources from this period reveal that the colonial exploitation of local supplies prompted an astronomical rise in the cost of basic food necessities, leaving most workers without the

⁶⁴ Ville d'Alexandrie, Séance de la Commission Municipale du 8 Mai 1918, 9, Maṭbū'āt Section of Egyptian National Archives.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the famine in Syria during World War I, see Chapter 1 of Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 19 - 38. For a discussion of the Middle Eastern Supply Center and its role in the prevention of wartime food shortages, see Robert Vitalis and Stephen Heydemann, "War, Keynesianism and Colonialism: Explaining State-Market Relations in the Postwar Middle East," in *War, Institutions and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Stephen Heydemann (Berkeley, California: 2000), 100 - 148.

⁶⁶ J.C.B. Richmond, *Egypt, 1798 - 1952: Her Advance Towards a Modern Identity* (London: Methuen, 1977), 174.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

ability to afford a proper diet. While British reports about conditions in Egypt place the rise in the cost of food at 110% - 150%,⁶⁸ Egyptian statistics note that the price of key food staples such as beans rose by over 200% between 1916 and 1920.⁶⁹ This created even greater hardship for the working poor, who relied heavily on vegetarian sources of protein. The decline in food imports during the war combined with the requisitioning of local supplies contributed to the rapid and unprecedented inflation. These conditions prompted waves of collective action against shopkeepers and mass looting in working-class districts, often headed by the *fitiwwa*.⁷⁰ One *fitiwwa* by the name of ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf from Ḥāret al-Farahda had a reputation for organizing such protests.⁷¹ Like most *fitiwwa*, his responsibility was to take care of the poor in his neighborhood, which often involved an unsanctioned redistribution of wealth in times of need.

Yet the war affected the food industry as a whole, and many of the small shopkeepers who became the target of looting also suffered from wartime economic policies. In response to the protests and looting at the beginning of the war, the central government imposed price ceilings on both European and native shopkeepers. According to a petition filed by the Greek Shopkeeper's Guild in Alexandria on August 28, 1914, these regulations disproportionately affected European shopkeepers who imported most of their products from abroad and faced a 10

⁶⁸ “1918 Report of The International Association for the Repression of the White Slave Trade,” pp. 16, FO 141/466/1, The National Archives of the UK Government.

⁶⁹ Wizārat al-Māliyya, Maṣlahat ‘Umūm al-Iḥṣā’ al-‘Amiriyya, *Al-Iḥṣā’ al-Sanawi al-‘Ām lil-Qaṭr al-Miṣrī li-Sanat 1921* [Ministry of Finance, Statistical Department, *Yearly Statistics for Egypt for the Year 1921*] (Cairo: Government Press, 1922), 113.

⁷⁰ *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 1, 1914, 2.

⁷¹ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 216.

- 30% increase in customs since the beginning of the war.⁷² These Greek shopkeepers argued that they were more adversely affected by the price ceilings than native shopkeepers because their customers were primarily upper class natives and Europeans who sought higher quality products than the majority of the population. They claimed that since native shopkeepers typically sold lower quality items that were less expensive than the products they sold, the government should create a different set of price ceilings for European and native shopkeepers.⁷³ Contrary to the arguments raised by the Greek Shopkeeper's Guild, other sources suggest that native shopkeepers also suffered harm during the war. One of the victims of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case, Nabawiyya bint Gum'a, was the wife of a native oil merchant who became acquainted with Raya and Sakina when she began selling wares and sex in al-Labbān's Sūq al-Gum'a.⁷⁴ Her presence in the marketplace as a petit bourgeois woman, combined with the bankruptcy of her husband's business shortly after her disappearance, suggests that wartime colonial policies negatively affected both native and European shopkeepers.

In addition to price controls, the colonial state also implemented capital controls to regulate the movement and price of gold during the second half of the war. At the beginning of the war, Britain and its colonies went off the gold standard, and the price of the British gold pound (called the sovereign) was fixed at 97.5 Egyptian piasters.⁷⁵ However, during the first two years of the war, people who attempted to sell their gold in Egypt received prices well below this

⁷² Mukātabat Lajnat al-Tamwīn bi Sha'n al-Shakwa al-Muqaddama min al-Baqqālīn al-Arwām bil-Iskandirayya [Supply Board's Report Regarding the Complaint Presented by Greek Shopkeepers in Alexandria], September 29, 1914, Cabinet of Overseers and Ministers, Egyptian National Archives.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 471.

⁷⁵ Wizārat al-Māliyya, *Al-Iḥṣā' al-Sanawi al-Ām lil-Qaṭr al-Miṣrī li-Sanat 1921*, 279.

value.⁷⁶ This further increased the suffering of those who had traditionally relied on the sale of their gold in times of need. Citing this economic injustice as the rationale behind their decision, the colonial state implemented a system of hallmarking gold and silver in June 1916 which included the standardization of prices.⁷⁷ Although the system of hallmarking was allegedly intended to alleviate the suffering of the population, it created new hardships for those who had already obtained adulterated gold and could no longer sell it legally. To further increase central state control over gold, the Egyptian Minister of Finance, Yūsuf Wahba, introduced new legislation in October 1916 banning the export of gold from Egypt. Wahba referenced capital controls in Europe as a model to be emulated, noting that the demands of the war necessitated similar controls in Egypt.⁷⁸ The attempt to increase colonial state control over the identification and circulation of precious metals thus contributed to the centralization of the Egyptian economy during the war.

Central state control over the Egyptian economy manifested not only in control over capital and goods, but also in control over labor. In 1917, the British Army initiated a recruitment/conscription campaign in Egypt in an attempt to secure able-bodied men to serve as manual laborers for the Allied Forces on various war fronts. Whereas the army had hired 'voluntary' manual laborers like Aḥmad Ragab during the first half of the war, the 1917 campaign

⁷⁶ See Sālim, *Miṣr fil-Ḥarb*, 95; See also Tarik M. Yousef, "Egypt's Growth Performance Under Economic Liberalism: A Reassessment with the New GDP Estimates, 1885 - 1945," Working Paper 0211, *ERF Working Paper Series* (Cairo, Egypt). Some newspapers attributed the low prices to new state regulations against the melting of gold. See *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 2, 1914, 3.

⁷⁷ Mashrū' Qānūn 'An al-Tamgha Yusrī 'Ala al-Ajānib wil-Waṭānīyyīn wi Yaqda bi Tamghat Jamī' al-Maṣūghāt al-Dhahabiyya wil-Fiḍiyya 1916 [Legal Decree about Hallmarking which Applies to Foreigners and Nationals and Requires the Hallmarking of Gold and Silver Jewelry], Cabinet of Overseers and Ministers, Egyptian National Archives. This archival document also cites the impurity of gold coming from Germany and Austria as one of the main reasons for the fall in the price of gold in Egypt.

⁷⁸ Mashrū' Marsūm bi-Mana' Tasḍīr al-Dhahab 1916 [Legal Decree Prohibiting the Export of Gold 1916], Cabinet of Overseers and Ministers, Egyptian National Archives.

marked a turning point in that the British Army forcibly took men from their families when it could not meet its quotas for laborers.⁷⁹ Given the further reductions in foreign trade in 1917 and the limited employment opportunities for dock and transport workers in Alexandria, it is unclear whether unemployed workers perceived their involvement in the Labor Corps in 1917 - 18 to be more coercive than the dire circumstances they faced at home. The coercion was embedded not in the recruitment/conscription campaign but rather in the larger structure of colonial exploitation in Egypt which had turned these men into a surplus population, leaving them dispossessed and displaced. Given the fact that working for the British Army was one of the few sources of regular employment for urban workers during this period, men in Alexandria were also likely aware of the monetary benefits of this position. It is thus not surprising that Raya and Sakina's husbands served in the Egyptian Labor Corps in 1917 - 18 along with *fitiwwa* who had difficulty finding employment during the war, such as 'Urābī Hassān.⁸⁰ Increased central state control over native labor and resources during the second half of the war made the question of voluntary versus forced recruitment irrelevant.

The creation of institutions to monitor native resources and supplies during the second half of the war contributed to central state control over the economy. In 1916, the Commission of Commerce and Industry was formed to suggest policies to alleviate wartime shortages, and the report it published in 1918 called for increased government support for industrialization.⁸¹ Labor historian Joel Beinin has called this "the first organizational expression of an Egyptian

⁷⁹ Ellis Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt - Egypt 1919," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992), 263. See also Beinin, "Formation of the Egyptian Working Class," 19. There is no consensus among historians as to the number of men recruited to serve in the Egyptian Labor Corps, but Beinin places the number at over one million.

⁸⁰ 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 146.

⁸¹ Ulaş Karakoç, "Sources of Economic Growth in Interwar Egypt and Turkey: Industrial Growth, Tariff Protection and the Role of Agriculture" (PhD diss., The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014), 33.

bourgeoisie,"⁸² yet what is noticeable is the commission's call for the state to play an active role in capitalist development. Colonial state control over the economy continued to expand during this period, and in March 1918, the state regulated food production and distribution through the creation of the Supplies Control Board, which took food directly from cultivators and distributed it in the cities.⁸³ The Supplies Control Board also determined the quantity of grains, beans and cotton that cultivators would plant each year, as well as the type and quantity of foodstuffs to be imported and exported.⁸⁴ This institution lasted until March 1920, at which point it was replaced by the Department of Supplies, which continued to limit exports until June 1921.⁸⁵ Colonial state control over native labor, capital, and commodities thus continued well into the early interwar period.

Although the wartime economy negatively impacted workers, it expanded economic opportunities for those who had some degree of capital or means of production. The drastic reduction in foreign trade due to the British army's monopolization of shipping routes created conditions for the growth of native industries. It also forced large businesses that had previously relied on exports to cater to domestic markets, which further contributed to the development of an Egyptian economy.⁸⁶ Beinun notes that a number of domestic industries expanded during the

⁸² Beinun, "Formation of the Egyptian Working Class," 19.

⁸³ Goldberg, "Peasants in Revolt," 263.

⁸⁴ *Reports by His Majesty's High Commissioner on the Finances, Administration, and Condition of Egypt and the Soudan for the Year 1920* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1921), 59 - 60.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Whereas the Egyptian cigarette industry had previously depended on foreign markets, the drastic reduction in exports during the war forced it to find new ways of distributing its products domestically. For example, by 1918, the Melkonian cigarette industry had established 80 cigarette selling posts in Egypt and the Sudan. See Relli Shechter, *Smoking, Culture and Economy in the Middle East: The Egyptian Tobacco Market* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 81.

war, including "textiles, olive oil pressing, tanning, grain milling, food processing, furniture making, and iron founding,"⁸⁷ and census records show that the number of people employed in industry in Alexandria expanded from 32,895 in 1907 to 41,920 in 1917. The wartime economy was also characterized by a significant expansion in domestic commerce. While European merchants in Alexandria protested the new import taxes levied during the war, Egyptian merchants found that these import taxes opened up new economic opportunities for them which had previously been foreclosed by the advantages granted to European merchants under the capitulations. Consequently, census records show that the number of people employed in commerce in Alexandria expanded from 18,823 in 1907 to 29,672 in 1917.⁸⁸ Census records for Egypt reflect an even greater expansion in industry and commerce. The number of people employed in manufacturing throughout Egypt grew from 281,416 in 1907 to 423,109 in 1917, while the number of people employed in commerce grew from 161,210 in 1907 to 280,562 in 1917.⁸⁹ The wartime economy was thus marked by the growth of domestic industry and commerce in both Alexandria and Egypt at large.

According to the picture that emerges from the investigation records of the Alexandria serial murder case, the most significant expansion of industry and commerce occurred from below. The massive reduction in both imports and exports ensured that small businesses grew while large businesses contracted, leading to the growth of the petite bourgeoisie and the

⁸⁷ Beinín, "Formation of the Egyptian Working Class," 19.

⁸⁸ Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 784.

⁸⁹ Beinín and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*, 38.

increasing informalization of labor.⁹⁰ For example, Raya's neighbor, Ramaḍān al-Naggār, was an independent carpenter whose workshop expanded to include a few workers over the course of the war. His wife, Fāṭima bint Muḥammad ‘Abd Rabbu, was a domestic servant who became a broker and began employing native children to work in the homes of European families.⁹¹ Muḥammad Khafāga, one of the *fitiwwa* of al-Labbān who grew up in the working class neighborhood of Ḥāret al-Farahda, started a small dairy business.⁹² Many of these small businesses tapped into the informal economy rather than employing permanent workers in factories. For example, Anīsa bint Muḥammad Raḍwān, one of the murder victims who had worked as an independent tailor at the beginning of the war, eventually began working for a textile company under a putting-out system.⁹³ Another teenage girl by the name of Burg who appears in the records also made her living as an informal worker by collecting used cigarette butts for an independent cigarette maker.⁹⁴ Merchants also relied on women like Sakina's neighbor, Sayyida bint Sulayman, to peddle their goods in the streets and marketplaces.⁹⁵ The way in which industry expanded in Alexandria under wartime colonial policies thus created new opportunities for the petite bourgeoisie while pushing a growing number of workers into the informal economy.

⁹⁰ The Egyptian cigarette industry is a prime example of the contraction of large businesses during the war due to restrictions on exports. Shechter shows that cigarette factories in Egypt attempted to reduce the volume of work and wages throughout the war. See Shechter, *Smoking, Culture and Economy in the Middle East*, 88.

⁹¹ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 486.

⁹² ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 183.

⁹³ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 349.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁹⁵ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 712.

Statistics from this period further illustrate the increasing informalization of labor during the war. Census records show that the percentage of the population employed in Alexandria increased from 60.60% in 1907 to 69.07% in 1917. Yet despite the growth in employment, the percentage of the working population employed in industry in Alexandria fell from 16.97% in 1907 to 15.77% in 1917. The rise in overall employment instead corresponds to a 10% increase in the number of day laborers and domestic servants in 1917. Thus, whereas day laborers and domestic servants constituted 43.91% of Alexandria's working population in 1907, this category of workers grew to 54.05% of the working population in 1917, as indicated in the table below.

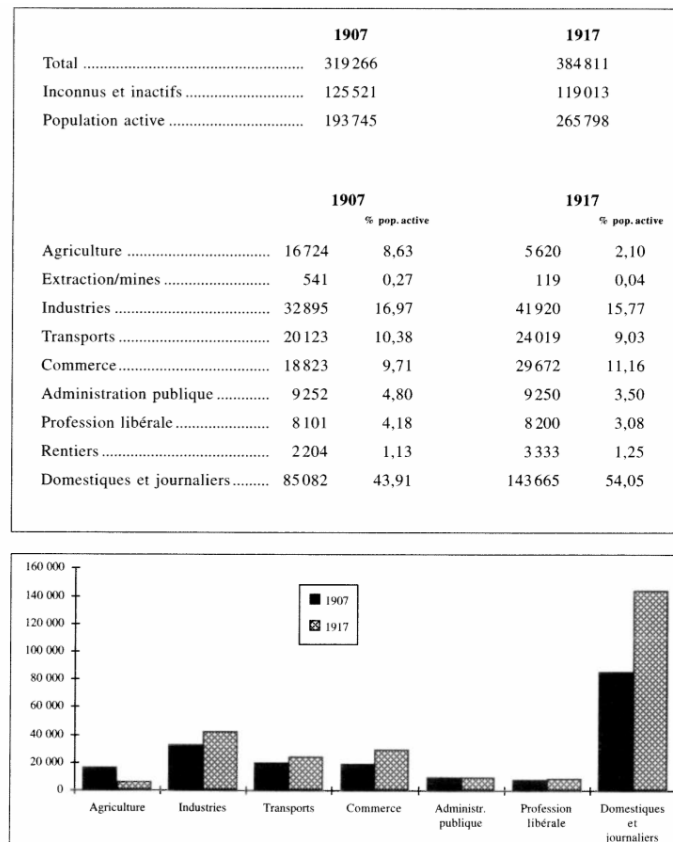


Figure 1.4: Table of occupations declared in Alexandria census records in 1907 and 1917 ⁹⁶

⁹⁶ This chart was taken from Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 784. On page 783, Ilbert indicates that the category of industry also included artisans.

The vast increase in the number of day laborers and domestic servants illustrates the way in which the growth of industry and commerce in wartime Alexandria was accompanied by the expansion of the informal economy. The testimonies of witnesses and suspects in the Alexandria serial murder case indicate that as working-class jobs became increasingly rare, irregular, precarious, and insufficient to meet the costs of living over the course of the war, workers turned to a variety of informal and illicit activities to meet their daily needs, including street peddling, domestic service, the sex trade, and the unlicensed sale of food and drink. The increase in this category of workers also suggests that a greater percentage of the population was forced to work during the war, particularly women and children. It is for this reason that Fāṭima the servant broker managed to accumulate a significant degree of wealth from employing large numbers of impoverished native children in al-Labbān as servants in the homes of European families. The restructuring of Alexandria's economy during the war thus led to the expansion of the informal economy and illicit markets. These markets functioned as a form of resistance to the colonial state's increased control over the economy yet simultaneous neglect of workers and their families during the war. The following section will examine the proliferation of illicit markets in Alexandria by tracing the footsteps of some of the suspects in the Alexandria serial murder case, highlighting the new socioeconomic relationships they forged along the way.

The Growth of Alexandria's Illicit Markets

When Aḥmad Ragab left Alexandria to work for the British Army at the beginning of World War I, Sakina attempted to support herself by peddling cheese and sugar cane.⁹⁷ It was not long before she discovered that she could not make a living from this trade during the war and began to supplement her income with streetwalking.⁹⁸ While roaming the streets and marketplaces, she became friends with a number of women who were engaged in similar activities. One streetwalker by the name of Nabawiyya, the wife of a Ṣaʿīdī fisherman, soon became one of Sakina's closest friends, as did Zannūba the chicken dealer, who occasionally sold sex to her clients.⁹⁹ While Sakina and her friends sometimes sat at bars and cafes to solicit clients, the police were known to occasionally raid these venues in search of clandestine sex workers, particularly for the stated purpose of protecting soldiers from the spread of venereal disease.¹⁰⁰ These policies made selling sex on the street and in the marketplace safer and more affordable for women during periods in which their husbands were away working for the British Army.

Yet streetwalking as a married woman was not without its risks, particularly because Sakina's husband, Aḥmad, sometimes showed up unannounced during the short vacations he received from the army. Those visits were a mixed blessing for Sakina, for although she risked her husband learning about her clandestine activities, he would usually bring her up to 12 pounds

⁹⁷ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 705.

⁹⁸ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 73.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 442; ʿAbd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 204.

¹⁰⁰ See Ministry of the Interior, Egypt, *Annual Report of the Alexandria City Police, 1921 - 1922* (Cairo: Government Press, 1924), 4IBS/6/049, The Women's Library, London School of Economics and Political Science. See also ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 309.

each time he visited.¹⁰¹ Compared to the fact that her brother-in-law, Ḥasab Allah, could barely scrape together a pound a month working as a day laborer, Aḥmad's visits during the first half of the war left Sakina with a small fortune. Yet this fortune did not last long, for Sakina claimed that after Aḥmad left Alexandria, she was usually forced to surrender her husband's money to the other members of her family, which left her in the same penniless predicament. Aḥmad's long periods of absence eventually became a source of hardship for Sakina, and halfway through the war she demanded a divorce.

Throughout the war, Sakina continued to move from one clandestine activity to another, often engaging in several simultaneously. At one point, she joined a group that would take rotting horse meat from a British military camp in Sidi Bishr and then sell it in al-Labbān at low prices.¹⁰² Although European newspapers in Alexandria complained that the colonial state's public health regulations were only being enforced in European quarters,¹⁰³ Sakina was imprisoned for selling rotten meat. Sakina's friend, Zannūba, was also known for selling poultry that died of natural causes (known in Arabic as *fitīs*) to her friends and neighbors, most of whom knowingly purchased it at reduced prices despite the health risks.¹⁰⁴ The trade in unsanitary meat increased in 1920, when an additional spike in the cost of meat prompted the central government to begin discussions about potential solutions to the meat crisis.¹⁰⁵ The astronomical rise in the

¹⁰¹ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 706.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ "Impure Food," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 2, 1917, 4.

¹⁰⁴ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 164.

¹⁰⁵ Madhkara min Wizārat al-Zirā'a 'An Mas'alat Ghilā' al-Laḥm bi Madīnatay al-Qāhira wil-Iskandirayya [Memorandum from the Ministry of Agriculture Regarding the Rising Cost of Meat in the Cities of Cairo and Alexandria], Cabinet of Overseers and Ministers, Egyptian National Archives.

cost of protein-rich food sources during the war created a thriving black market in meat, which contributed to a growing public health crisis among the working poor.¹⁰⁶

The black market in food that emerged during the war was exacerbated by the actions of merchants and shopkeepers who allegedly evaded the price controls by hiding their products and selling them on the black market at a higher price.¹⁰⁷ Colonial state reports accused shopkeepers of refusing to adhere to price controls on basic food necessities,¹⁰⁸ and newspapers attacked merchants for "profiteering" during the war, frequently listing the names of both native and European merchants who had been imprisoned for selling products above the price ceiling.¹⁰⁹ Newspaper reports also documented a number of bread riots that involved the looting of stores, particularly in the first few months of the war.¹¹⁰ Wartime shortages were thus blamed on the greed of merchants and shopkeepers rather than on the actions of the colonial state, leading to conflicts between workers and the petit bourgeoisie.

In addition to her engagement with the black market in food, Sakina also got involved in the black market in gold, which became increasingly lucrative in the aftermath of the war. According to statistics produced by the colonial state in 1921, while the price of the British sovereign was 97.5 Egyptian piasters during the war, the price increased after the war ended,

¹⁰⁶ See Nancy Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars: Epidemics and the Politics of Public Health* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 12 for a summary of the way in which food crises in Egypt during World War I intersected with the spread of disease among the population.

¹⁰⁷ Sālim, *Miṣr fil-Ḥarb*, 142.

¹⁰⁸ "Letter from Cairo, July 15, 1918," *Great Britain and the East, Volume 14*, 659. <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=PMFCAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR2>, accessed April 2016.

¹⁰⁹ "Egypt's Food Profiteers: Cairo Military Tribunal," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 21, 1919, 6.

¹¹⁰ "Egypt's Unemployed: Demonstrations in Cairo: Another Crowd Crying for Bread: Extraordinary Scenes in the Mousky This Morning," *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 1, 1914, page 3; "The Disturbances in Cairo: Natives Charged with Pillaging Shops," *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 3, 1914, page 4.

reaching 178 Egyptian piasters in February 1920.¹¹¹ These records state that while people hid their gold during the war, the surge in the price of gold in 1920 brought much of this gold out of hiding. This development was likely related to the renewed circulation of gold on the world market after the war, in addition to the fact that states actively sought to increase the quantity of gold in their official reserves. Thus, when Sakina pawned the same gold watch with Christo Marjan on multiple occasions after the war, she received a different amount each time, which Christo told the state prosecutor was due to fluctuations in the market value of gold.¹¹² Official records of local gold transactions acquired by the state prosecutor also indicate that between January 1918 and November 1920, Sakina and her third husband, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, purchased gold jewelry at least 28 times: 5 times in 1918, 5 times in 1919, and 18 times in 1920.¹¹³ Their purchase of gold increased significantly in 1920 even as the price of gold skyrocketed. Given the fact that the records show that the couple sold gold jewelry only 3 times during this period, and given the fact that the police found very little gold hidden in their apartments or on their bodies, it is likely that Sakina and Muḥammad either sold this gold on the black market or invested it into other illicit activities, such as the clandestine sex trade. The records also show a large number of gold transactions among Sakina's friends and neighbors, suggesting that the rapid circulation of gold during this period was a source of livelihood for many subalterns in Alexandria.

The black markets in food and gold were accompanied by the spread of adulterated alcohol as well as the spread of unlicensed bars and brothels that served it. As refugees, migrants

¹¹¹ Wizārat al-Māliyya, *Al-Iḥṣā’ al-Sanawi al-‘Ām lil-Qaṭr al-Miṣrī li-Sanat 1921*, 279.

¹¹² Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 520 - 522.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 148 - 157.

and soldiers continued to move through Alexandria during the war, those who could not find employment in the food and mechanical industries found that they could make a living off catering to newcomers and visitors, leading to the expansion of the service sector. Many of those who were new to the service sector did not have the resources to obtain licenses and shops, so they operated bars, cafes and brothels informally out of private homes. This was made possible by the fact that the cost of rent rose only 15% during the war while the cost of basic food necessities rose 150 - 200%.¹¹⁴ Adulterated alcohol, referred to as *sokolanse* in Alexandria, further assisted in the reduction of operating costs.¹¹⁵ Unlicensed venues were popular among clients because they remained open late at night, evading the military restrictions on operating hours which the colonial state could only impose on licensed venues.¹¹⁶ For this reason, Raya and Sakina operated a number of clandestine brothels in private homes throughout the second half of the war and its immediate aftermath. They were joined by Amīna bint Mansūr, who operated a hashish cafe managed by her nephew, a former butcher, on the floor underneath one of Raya and Sakina's brothels.¹¹⁷ Amīna's husband, a former transport worker at the port, also sold *sokolanse* to neighbors from a makeshift bar that he operated from his home.¹¹⁸ Service work became the primary means of living for Alexandria's working poor.

¹¹⁴ "1918 Report for The International Association for the Repression of the White Slave Trade," 16.

¹¹⁵ See "Report by the Commandant of the Cairo City Police, March 20, 1916," FO 141/466/2, The National Archives of the UK Government. According to this report, state inspectors found the percentage of adulterated alcohol to be 22%. See also 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 204. According to Raya, *sokolanse* was stronger than regular alcohol.

¹¹⁶ Ville d'Alexandrie, Séance de la Commission Municipale du 23 Janvier 1918, 11, Maṭbū'āt Section of Egyptian National Archives. Under martial law, the mandatory closing time was 9 p.m.

¹¹⁷ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 182; 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 189.

¹¹⁸ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 213; 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 188.

The opening of a military camp near Sūq al-Gum‘a in 1917 further contributed to the growth of the service sector in al-Labbān. The camp was established to prepare native men to serve in the Egyptian Labor Corps, making it a site through which soldiers and native laborers moved regularly.¹¹⁹ Its proximity to the largest marketplace in al-Labbān made it a prime client base for sex work, and Raya and Sakina used this opportunity to establish a clandestine brothel in the marketplace while their husbands were away serving in the Egyptian Labor Corps. Given that Sūq al-Gum‘a was a popular place for streetwalkers, the sisters procured a number of them for their brothel and took a commission from them rather than hiring sex workers and paying them wages. Opening a clandestine brothel was more secure than opening a licensed brothel because the colonial state increased its monitoring of licensed sex workers during the war. It was also more profitable because sex workers who maintained their public respectability and social status could charge their clients more money. Since clandestine sex work was one of the few work opportunities available to petit bourgeois women, Raya and Sakina's clandestine brothels became a fluid space where women of various social classes congregated. Raya and Sakina's decision to work with independent sex workers in the informal economy was thus a strategic way of navigating Alexandria's fluid spaces during the war.

As the central state increased its control over native labor and resources during the war, subalterns found ways to channel resources from the colonial army to their families by navigating Alexandria's porous boundaries. From clandestine prostitution to the sale of *sokolanse* to stealing horsemeat from British military camps, subalterns in al-Labbān managed the hardship of the war by finding ways to escape the colonial state's wartime regulations. The next chapter

¹¹⁹ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 149.

will examine the clandestine sex trade as one of the illicit markets that formed in resistance to wartime colonial policies. It will analyze the way in which the wartime economy altered gendered relations of power in the sex trade and challenged traditional forms of subaltern sovereignty. The attempts to reestablish patriarchal authority after the war in the midst of a changing social, political and economic climate directly contributed to the gender and sexual violence of the 1920 Alexandria serial murders. The next chapter takes a closer look at the dynamics of Alexandria's sex trade both before, during and after World War I to highlight the historical transformations wrought by the war and the destruction of the fluidity that had previously characterized the clandestine sex trade.

Chapter 2

Navigating the Boundaries of Respectability: Mobile Sex Workers and Clandestine Prostitution Networks

In 1919, A.C. McBarnet, Judge at the Native Court of Appeal in Egypt and President of the Cairo Branch's Executive Committee for the International Association for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic, drafted a report called, "A Series of Laws Dealing with Prostitution and Venereal Disease." After providing a detailed discussion of prostitutes as 'forces of disorder,' McBarnet outlined his proposed solutions for what he regarded as the alarming spread of prostitution in Egypt in recent years, ending with a grave warning about the efforts of "interested persons to convert Egypt into a pleasure center for the world."¹ McBarnet insisted that the growing prevalence of prostitution had begun in the years prior to World War I, although he also argued that the war brought about an increased demand for commercial sex due to a rise in the male population, which consequently increased the supply of prostitutes.

As shown in the previous chapter, World War I did more than simply raise the demand for commercial sex. By drastically increasing the cost of living and taking over a million Egyptian men away from their families, the war made work a necessity for many women in Alexandria. This chapter will show that sex work was the most profitable form of employment available to them and that the economic effects of the war directly contributed to its spread. Yet in contrast to the priorities of colonial authorities, this chapter is not primarily concerned with the spread of prostitution during the war but rather with the way in which the war altered the organization of

¹ See A.C. McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws Dealing with Prostitution and Venereal Disease: "A Basis for Discussion"* (Cairo, The Nile Mission Press, 1919), 7 - 8, FO 141/466/1, White Slave Traffic (1915 - 1927), The National Archives of the UK Government.

the sex trade in Alexandria, the politics of sovereignty associated with this reorganization, and the consequences this had for sex workers in the early interwar period. This chapter argues that more aggressive attempts to monitor sex workers during the war due to the alleged spread of venereal disease were counterproductive, making clandestine sex work more profitable and prevalent than licensed prostitution. This development increased the exploitation of sex workers in the interwar period as trafficking networks and local sovereigns gained control of the clandestine trade.

The effect of World War I on the sex trade in Alexandria is essential for understanding the Alexandria serial murders that dominated the Egyptian press in 1920 - 21 because the premise of this study is that the primary motive behind the murders was not robbery but rather the attempt to control the movement and earnings of sex workers. The state prosecutor had assumed from the beginning of the investigation that robbery was the motive, partly because the number of robberies in Egypt had doubled since the end of the war and newspapers during this period frequently covered stories of elaborate gang robberies which utilized new methods of avoiding detection.² Yet the evidence presented during the investigation of the case suggests that the majority of the murder victims were self-employed sex workers who had entered the trade during the war and had subsequently resisted the control of a new interwar trafficking network and/or presented a threat to their business operations. The effect of the war on the gender and sexual politics of female mobility thus functions as a necessary starting point for an analysis of the murder case.

² See Ministry of Justice, *Statistics for the Native, Shari'a and Mixed Courts, 1919 - 1920* (Cairo: Government Press, 1921), 3.

Due to the fact that the majority of twentieth-century Egyptian records on criminality and prostitution are to this day housed in Dār al-Maḥfūzāt, an archive that many researchers have had difficulty accessing, the two thousand pages of legal records associated with the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case currently provide the greatest insight into the commercial sex trade in Alexandria during and after World War I. A few dissertations have contributed to our knowledge of prostitution in twentieth-century Egypt, yet the majority of these studies focus on the capital city of Cairo and are primarily based on European rather than Arabic sources.³ The sex trade in Alexandria deserves greater attention for a number of reasons. One, the image of the scantily clad, orientalized sex worker frequently appears in Egyptian and European literature as a symbol of Alexandria in the first half of the twentieth century, highlighting the way in which the sex trade was central to the social and cultural life of the city. Two, the female accomplices in the 1920 serial murder case, Raya and her younger sister Sakina, have remained to this day the most popular Egyptian caricatures, indicating that the history of Alexandria's sex trade continues to play a central role in the dominant discourse about gender and sexuality in Egypt. Three, European activists and colonial officials saw Alexandria as a global center for the trafficking of sex workers, and some studies of prostitution in Egypt have noted that the majority of native sex workers in certain brothels around the country had all come from Alexandria.⁴ The sex trade in Alexandria thus provides important insight into the formation of transnational and regional subaltern networks and the challenges they posed to colonial and nationalist interests. Despite the

³ See Dunne, "Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process""; Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains Around Us"; Hammad, "Mechanizing People, Localizing Modernity." Although the previous two dissertations are based mostly on European sources, they are nevertheless extremely important contributions to our knowledge of prostitution in Egypt. Bruce Dunne's 1996 dissertation in particular has made important theoretical contributions to the study of gender and sexuality in modern Egypt and has laid the foundation for a number of subsequent projects.

⁴ Dunne, "Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process"," 157 and 288.

importance of Alexandria's sex trade to our understanding of both global and local developments during World War I and the interwar period, no studies have been dedicated to prostitution in Alexandria. This chapter thus uses a combination of legal records, police reports, judicial statistics, census records, and employment records to contribute to a small but growing body of literature on prostitution in Egypt and to simultaneously fill an important gap in our understanding of Alexandria's commercial sex trade and its relationship to socioeconomic and political developments in twentieth-century Egypt.

Our understanding of Alexandria as a center of sex trafficking in the first half of the twentieth century has largely been hampered by the discourse of 'white slavery,' a moral and racial panic in Britain over the entrance of young white women and girls into the commercial sex trade of colonized countries. Bruce Dunne's study of 'white slavery' activism in Egypt shows the way in which the colonial panic over sex trafficking was shaped by both colonial concerns over the growing prevalence of interracial sex as well as elite concerns over the mobility of the English working class.⁵ The desire to preserve the racial purity of the colonizer in addition to monopolizing the labor of white subalterns thus shaped the discourse of sex trafficking in the first half of the twentieth century. The fact that the lens of 'white slavery' activists in Egypt was dominated by racial and class motivations to abolish the presence of white subalterns in the sex trade raises questions about the usefulness of their observations to a historical reconstruction of Alexandria's sex trade. Since the publication of Dunne's critical work, no scholar has attempted to deal with the contentious issue of sex trafficking in early twentieth-century Egypt, particularly in light of the fact that colonial documents provide the bulk of available information about this

⁵ Dunne, "Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process"," 154 - 170.

historical phenomenon. This speaks to the fundamental question about how historians should read colonial documents, a dilemma which was at once illuminated and complicated by Edward Said's analysis of the way in which imperialist power shaped the knowledge produced about colonized societies.⁶ Given the colonial interests that produced the discourse on sex trafficking, what can these documents tell us about the lives of sex workers in early twentieth-century Alexandria?

This chapter argues that combining the legal records of the 1920 Alexandria murder case with the documents about 'white slave traffic' enables an analysis of the overlaps and discontinuities between subaltern experiences and the colonial imagination of Alexandria's sex trade. Combining the methodologies of social and cultural history is essential to understanding both the larger structure of subaltern networks that transformed the lives of sex workers in Alexandria in the early interwar period and the way in which the politics of colonial and nation-state formation shaped the development of these networks. In this sense, the study is concerned not only with the reconstruction of subaltern experiences, but also with the systems of exploitation that shaped these experiences. This chapter thus builds on feminist contributions to the field of subaltern studies by de-essentializing the category of the subaltern and highlighting the way in which hierarchies of power are constructed at the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality within subaltern spaces.⁷

⁶ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁷ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271 - 313. See also Kimberle Crenshaw's groundbreaking work on intersectionality, which has shaped the field of gender studies. Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (July 1991), 1241 - 1299.

In order to explain the transformations in the sex trade wrought by the war, the first half of this chapter provides a historical overview of the sex trade in Alexandria, focusing on the development of the regulation system, the formation of red light districts, the uneven application of laws regarding illicit sex, the policies adopted during the war, and the relationship between prostitution and social class in the larger context of employment opportunities for women in Alexandria. It will highlight the fluidity in the clandestine sex trade and the way in which it brought together women of various social classes. This section of the chapter attempts to reconstruct a nuanced picture of the hierarchies of power that existed in and around the sex trade in early twentieth-century Alexandria by relying on the experiences of sex workers as articulated in the legal records of the 1920 murder case. The second half of the chapter analyzes the relationship between wartime developments and subaltern network formation in Alexandria, and will examine the way in which these networks transformed the nature of clandestine prostitution and the lives of sex workers in interwar Alexandria. Sex trafficking will be examined as part of broader sociopolitical trends in the early twentieth century, most notably the increased visibility and strength of local networks in the wake of colonial and nation-state encroachment. These networks contributed to the hardening of social boundaries and the destruction of the fluidity that had previously characterized the sex trade.

The Prostitution Regulation System in Egypt⁸

The construction of the Maḥmūdiyya Canal in 1820 gradually transformed Alexandria into a bustling Mediterranean port city that attracted migrants with promises of fortune and social mobility. Over the next thirty years, the population of the city soared from 12,000 to 104,000, reaching over 320,000 by the end of the century.⁹ Given the high degree of mobility and anonymity in this rapidly expanding city, prostitution soon became a profitable economic venture. Although no formal regulation system was put into place until the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, Khaled Fahmy notes that the names of prostitutes were recorded in state registers during the French occupation of Egypt in the late eighteenth century, a practice which suggests that the control and monitoring of prostitution was part of the development and expansion of the modern state.¹⁰ This practice continued under the subsequent reign of Egypt's modernizing ruler, Mehmet Ali, until he banned prostitutes from major Egyptian cities in 1834 due to concerns over the discipline and health of his troops. The ban was apparently lifted in the second half of the nineteenth century, as both Fahmy and Liat Kozma argue that numerous legal cases from this period show that prostitution had once again become a prominent feature of both Cairo and Alexandria.¹¹

According to contemporary reports by medical practitioners and state authorities in Egypt, prostitution in Alexandria had reached unprecedented levels by the second half of the

⁸ The following section is an excerpt from a forthcoming article. See Nefertiti Takla, "Introduction to Prostitution in Alexandria." In *Trafficking in Women 1924-1926: The Paul Kinsie Reports for the League of Nations*. Geneva: United Nations Publications, 2016.

⁹ Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 757.

¹⁰ Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century," 78 - 79.

¹¹ See Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women*, and Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt."

1870s.¹² This sharp rise in the number of sex workers can be attributed to demographic changes prompted by political and economic developments in the Mediterranean region. While the global demand for Egyptian cotton during the American civil war had restructured rural Egyptian economies and brought large waves of immigrants from Italy, Greece and Malta into Alexandria, the drop in the demand for cotton in the post-civil war era left many of these Egyptian peasants and Southern Europeans in precarious economic straits. With the country hovering on the verge of bankruptcy in the mid-1870s, Southern European and rural migrants in Alexandria turned to prostitution in increasing numbers. More aggressive attempts to abolish slavery in Egypt in the 1870s also brought newly manumitted Ethiopian and Southern Sudanese slaves into Alexandria's expanding sex economy. In addition to these domestic developments, Alexandria had long been subject to the ebb and flow of Mediterranean crises; thus, the large-scale migrations set in motion by the outbreak of war in the Balkans in the second half of the 1870s further contributed to Alexandria's fluctuating demography.

Although the increased visibility of sex workers in Alexandria in the late 1870s prompted some doctors and state officials to call for the regulation of prostitution, it was not until the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 that a system of regulation was put into place.¹³ The regulation system required sex workers to register with the state and renew their license on a

¹² Dunne, "Sexuality and the "Civilizing Process"," 106.

¹³ Hanan Hammad notes that the implementation of the regulations shortly after the British occupation of Egypt may be coincidental as, according to Emad Hilal, there is no evidence that the British were the ones to recommend the legislation despite the fact that they benefited from it. See, Hanan Hammad, "Between Egyptian "National Purity" and "Local Flexibility": Prostitution in al-Mahalla al-Kubra in the First Half of the 20th Century," *Journal of Social History* (Spring 2011), 3 and Emad Hilal, *Al-Baghāya fī Miṣr: Dirāsa Tārīkhiyya Ijtimā'iyya, 1834- 1949 [Prostitution in Egypt: A Sociohistorical Study, 1834 - 1949]* (Cairo: Al-'Arabī lil-Nashr wil-Tawzī', 2001), 201. This observation is supported by an Egyptian archival file noting the existence of a report by an Egyptian army doctor named Londinski in 1880 calling for the regulation of prostitution in Egypt. Unfortunately, when I requested the file in the Egyptian National Archives in April 2014, I received an empty folder. See Interior Ministry, File 2001-015911.

yearly basis. All sex workers had to be at least 18 years of age. As in Cairo, licensed prostitutes in Alexandria had to report to a state inspection bureau every week for a medical examination, and those who were diagnosed with a venereal disease were confined to a hospital and discharged only upon recovery. Licensed prostitutes who failed to appear for their weekly examination without a medical certificate to excuse their absence were required to pay a significant fine and face possible imprisonment. By making it unlawful for women to engage in commercial sex work without registering with the state, the regulation system turned prostitution into a full-time job and identity.¹⁴

The efficacy of these regulations was significantly reduced by a system of capitulations that granted the majority of Europeans in Egypt immunity from both taxation and Egyptian law, allowing them to be tried by their Consular Courts for any alleged criminal offense. Many non-European Christian and Jewish minorities in Egypt were also able to secure the same capitulatory privileges through a European power, usually by purchasing a certificate called a *berat* from a European consulate. Although the colonial state initially attempted to subject foreigners to the regulation system, a Mixed Court ruling in Alexandria in 1886 determined that sex workers who had capitulatory protection could only be detained and tried by their consular courts. This made the policing of prostitution in Alexandria particularly challenging due to the nature of its demographic composition. Alexandria contained the largest, most diverse and most transient population in Egypt, offering migrants a variety of seasonal employment opportunities. The

¹⁴ Consequently, when a licensed prostitute got married, she was stricken off the registration list because one could not be a married woman and a registered prostitute at the same time. Thus, for married women who wanted to engage in sex work, with or without the knowledge of their husbands, clandestine prostitution was their only option. It is for this reason that a number of the women who frequented clandestine brothels in the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case were married.

majority of sex workers were of Egyptian, French, Greek and Italian origin, yet statistics also document a significant number of Maltese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Syrian and Turkish sex workers.¹⁵ It was not uncommon to find women of three or four different nationalities in a single brothel, and policing such a brothel often required the cooperation of multiple consulates, which was both logistically and politically challenging.

The refusal of European consulates to cooperate with the regulations implemented by the British colonial regime was particularly prevalent in Alexandria due to the longstanding competition for hegemony between its French, Italian and Greek communities. Women's bodies were sites of political contestation, and a consulate's refusal to grant the state access to these bodies functioned as a form of communal resistance to the encroaching power of the colonial state. Yet the protection afforded to European sex workers from the regulations was due not only to the capitulations but also to the way in which race and class shaped perceptions of disease transmission, as the bodies of native and poor sex workers were seen as the primary sites of venereal infections. Thus, despite the fact that the British imposition of martial law in Egypt during World War I enabled the colonial regime to apply the regulations to European sex workers, colonial officials treated most European women as a 'more respectable class of prostitutes' and granted them access to less rigorous medical examinations and better hospital care.¹⁶ In the early twentieth century, it was both the exploitative nature of the capitulations as

¹⁵ League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts on Traffic in Women and Children, Part Two*, (Geneva, November 27th, 1927), 64.

¹⁶ "Report to the Commandant, Alexandria City Police, September 20, 1915," FO 141/466/2, The National Archives of the UK Government.

well as the racial and class assumptions embedded in the prostitution regulations that gave Alexandria the reputation of being the largest center of traffic in women and children.

The Formation of Red Light Districts in Alexandria

Prior to the implementation of the regulation system, sex workers were informally relegated to the social and geographic margins of the city by state officials and local communities. According to Kozma's study of nineteenth-century legal records, this practice of unofficial zoning gave rise to the formation of red light neighborhoods in Kom al-Naḍūra, Kom Bakīr, and al-Ṭarṭūshī, which were roughly within the boundaries of the al-Labbān district of Alexandria.¹⁷ Yet, despite efforts to isolate sex workers, some women navigated the boundary between respectability and abjection by engaging in sex work temporarily and covertly, plying their trade outside the boundaries of these neighborhoods. After the regulation system was put in place, the continued resistance of sex workers and procurers to their marginalization led to shifts in the boundaries of red light neighborhoods and the creation of several new brothel quarters throughout the working class districts of Alexandria, mostly in al-Labbān, al-ʿAṭṭārīn and al-Manshiyya, with the highest concentration of native prostitutes in al-Labbān and the highest concentration of European prostitutes in al-ʿAṭṭārīn.¹⁸ Unlike Cairo, which had more contiguous, clearly demarcated brothel quarters, Alexandria had several fragmented red light districts spread throughout the city in the early twentieth century, as shown below.

¹⁷ Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women*, 85.

¹⁸ *Journal Officiel du Gouvernement Egyptien*, 20 Mai 1915 (Cairo, Egypt), Maṭbūʿāt Section of Egyptian National Archives; *Census Register of the Alexandria Governorate, 1927* (Cairo, Egypt: Ministry of Finance, 1929), 76.



Figure 2.1: Map of Alexandria showing red light districts (highlighted in blue)¹⁹

The fragmentation of Alexandria’s red light districts made the sex trade a visible, normalized feature of its multiethnic urban landscape. Many novels, travel literature and war biographies have commented on the prominence of brothels and sex workers in their memory of the city.²⁰ Red light districts in Alexandria were in close proximity to police stations, hospitals, places of worship and major marketplaces, and thus were not as geographically isolated from the

¹⁹ I created this map of red light districts based on an edict issued by the Egyptian government in the *Journal Officiel du Gouvernement Egyptien* on May 20, 1915. This edict detailed every street and quarter in Alexandria where licensed prostitution was permitted.

²⁰ See the works of Ibrahim Abdel Meguid, Edwar al-Kharrat, Naguib Mahfouz, Constantine Cavafy, and Lawrence Durrell. See also Anthony Sattin, *Lifting the Veil: Two Centuries of Travelers, Traders and Tourists in Egypt* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011) and Robert Elverstone, *Farewell to the Horses: Dairy of a British Tommy: 1915-1919* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2014).

rest of society as they were in other parts of the country. Furthermore, the lack of contiguity within the licensed quarters of Alexandria led to the creation of numerous unofficial red light zones in the direct vicinity of those quarters. These zones were sites for the private homes of licensed prostitutes as well as the private homes and secret brothels of procurers, as both were pushed to the margins of society.

The creation of unofficial red light zones was a product of negotiation between those involved in the sex trade and those who sought to marginalize it, a continuation of the process of informal zoning that began in the pre-regulation era.²¹ In an attempt to resist the totalizing and essentialist label of being a ‘public woman,’ a number of licensed prostitutes chose to rent private homes outside of red light districts for the purpose of having a ‘respectable home’ to which they could return after work. Yet the social stigma that licensed prostitutes faced made it difficult for them to create boundaries between their personal and work identities, and thus their private homes were pushed into the liminal spaces between licensed districts and ‘respectable’ society. Clandestine brothel owners who were not well-connected were also pushed into the same spaces, as they were usually unable to maintain the secrecy of their business operations over an extended period of time. It was this process of zoning that brought Baṭṭa, a licensed prostitute, into the same home as Sakina, an unlicensed streetwalker and procurer who rented her private room to other clandestine sex workers. During the investigation of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case, Baṭṭa presented herself as a law-abiding prostitute who regularly attended her required weekly medical examinations and thus had a greater claim to respectability than the

²¹ See Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women*, and Fahmy, “Prostitution in Egypt.”

clandestine sex workers she lived with.²² Yet despite the politics of respectability that characterized Baṭṭa's testimony, licensed prostitutes were subject to the same social stigma and informal zoning that clandestine sex workers faced, leading them to inhabit the same illicit spaces.

Prostitution and Criminality

The illicit spaces of clandestine prostitution also became known as spaces of criminality, as those who had a criminal record were subject to the same processes of informal zoning as those who were involved in the sex trade. Muḥammad Shukayr, who had subleased a room in the same apartment as Baṭṭa and Sakina, allegedly rented the room for his girlfriend, who was near the completion of her five-year prison sentence.²³ When the owner of their apartment building was questioned about his tenants during the investigation, he described them as 'a bunch of thieves and prostitutes,' highlighting the way in which the two groups occupied the same discursive and geographic spaces.²⁴ Unofficial red light zones in Alexandria were thus the dwelling spaces of a wide range of marginalized people, including sex workers, clandestine brothel owners, and those who were labeled criminals.

The conflation of prostitution with spaces of criminality does not appear to be unique to the twentieth century, as Fahmy notes that the Egyptian state in the early nineteenth century

²² Malaf Qadayyat *Raya wi Sakina*, 249.

²³ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 67.

²⁴ Malaf Qadayyat *Raya wi Sakina*, 199.

recorded the names of prostitutes along with those of known thieves and beggars.²⁵ Fahmy and Kozma also show that prostitutes regularly appeared in nineteenth-century legal cases as both victims and perpetrators of crime. After the implementation of the regulation system in 1882, prostitutes began to appear more frequently in court statistics, mainly for violation of the regulations, which was dealt with as an infraction. Although the state licensing of prostitution was, ironically, the starting point for making certain acts of prostitution illegal, at no point in the nineteenth or early twentieth century was female prostitution itself treated as a crime, as this development was a product of global interwar processes that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Between 1882 and 1949, the only acts of female prostitution that could be prosecuted as a crime were those that involved extramarital sex, and in such cases, the crime would have been adultery, not prostitution.²⁶ A man who had sex with a married woman would also have been subject to punishment under the same legal proceedings. Unlike adultery cases in the precolonial era, the state could not initiate criminal proceedings against a woman for adultery.²⁷ The husband had to file a complaint and could revoke his complaint at any point in time, even after

²⁵ Fahmy, "Prostitution in Egypt," 78.

²⁶ Prior to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the shari'a court system defined adultery as both premarital and extramarital sex. The state paid particular attention to girls who had lost their virginity as a consequence of premarital sex. In cases of non-consensual premarital sex, the man could be convicted of defloration and punished. In cases of consensual premarital sex, both parties could be convicted and imprisoned. However, under the colonial regime, adultery was defined only as extramarital sex, and premarital sex was no longer criminalized.

²⁷ This change in the legal process of prosecuting adultery appears to be a surprisingly radical break from nineteenth century cases, in which Kozma argues that the state pursued the crime of zina as a threat to public security/morality. See Liat Kozma, "Negotiating Virginitly: Narratives of Defloration from Late Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24:1 (2004), 57 - 69. If this is true, then the colonial regime seems to have taken a step back from regulating sexual relations and the 'private domain,' which contradicts historiographical narratives of the expansion of the state under the colonial regime. Another possible reading of this shift is that since the colonial regime upheld the unit of the family as the basis of state power, it attempted to discourage the dissolution of marital bonds due to extramarital sex. See McBarnet, "Draft of a Series of Laws Dealing with Prostitution and Venereal Disease," 6. For a discussion of state attempts to deter divorce, see Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, 77 - 98.

conviction.²⁸ For this reason, many cases of married women who engaged in prostitution were never taken to criminal court, either because the woman was successful in keeping her activities hidden or because many of the married women who engaged in prostitution had a husband who was ill, absent, or economically disempowered. In some cases, the husband may have even condoned or encouraged his wife's activities.

During the investigation of the serial murders, the state prosecutor learned that Sakina's second husband, Aḥmad Rageb, had joined the Labor Corps at the beginning of World War I, and upon his first visit home, found his wife engaging in prostitution. Yet Aḥmad did not initiate any legal proceedings against Sakina. He then returned to the Labor Corps, and upon his second visit home, he found his wife living with her lover. Again, he did not file a complaint against her, and after pleading with her in vain, eventually consented to the divorce that she requested.²⁹

Although this story was used during the investigation as evidence that Sakina was an oversexed, unruly woman who defied all norms of respectability and femininity, it nevertheless reveals the way in which historical circumstances shaped the application of laws regarding illicit sex, as men's absence and economic disempowerment during the war gave women in Alexandria a relative degree of freedom and decision-making power.

The Effect of the War on Alexandria's Sex Trade

Although the market for commercial sex in Alexandria had been expanding throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in relation to its growth as a major hub of

²⁸ Egypt, *Draft Penal Code* (Cairo: Government Press, 1920), 77.

²⁹ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 131.

international trade, the way in which colonialism and military occupation restructured the city's economy during World War I was a major driving force behind the spread of prostitution.

Alexandria was home to the British army's base depot for its military campaigns in the Levant, which made it a center for military reinforcements.³⁰ After a brief recession at the beginning of the war, the demand for both labor and leisure activities gradually increased as soldiers and military supplies moved through Alexandria.³¹ Thus, while traditional markets in Egypt fluctuated during the war, the market for providing goods and services to soldiers in Alexandria steadily grew, attracting new waves of migrants from Upper Egypt. These Upper Egyptians were accompanied by Christian and Jewish refugees from the Levant, Armenian refugees fleeing genocide, Jewish refugees fleeing antisemitic violence in Eastern Europe, and Syrian refugees fleeing famine.³² Commercial sex was a key sector of Alexandria's wartime economy, and as will be discussed later in the chapter, it had the potential to yield greater profit for women than many of the other economic opportunities available at this time.

The attempts made by colonial military authorities to increase their control over licensed prostitution during the war inadvertently contributed to the spread of clandestine prostitution in Egypt. In the interest of both social control and protecting soldiers from venereal disease, military officials enforced the regulations more vigorously against licensed sex workers in both European and native brothel quarters.³³ The imposition of martial law enabled the colonial

³⁰ "The Base Depots," *The Army Service Corps of 1914 - 1918*, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.1914-1918.net/asc.htm#depot>

³¹ *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 5, 1915, 5.

³² *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 8, 1915, 3; *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 9, 1915, 4.

³³ "Report to the Commandant, Alexandria City Police, September 20, 1915."

regime to force licensed European sex workers to attend weekly medical examinations for the first time since 1886, and licensed native sex workers also became subject to a heightened degree of police harassment. Throughout the war, military authorities also put red light districts in Alexandria out of bounds to soldiers for months at a time, thereby harming the livelihood of licensed sex workers.³⁴ These wartime policies made clandestine prostitution a more stable source of income than licensed prostitution, creating a strong economic incentive for sex workers to practice their trade covertly.

The colonial regime's attempt to establish more direct control over the lives of sex workers was accompanied by more stringent policies against men who lived off the proceeds of prostitution, commonly referred to as *souteneurs* or *pimps*.³⁵ With the imposition of martial law, military authorities were able to crack down on both European and Egyptian men involved in the sex trade. Ibrāhīm al-Gharbī, who came from a slave-trading family and who later became the most infamous sex trafficker in interwar Egypt, was banished to his hometown in Aswan in 1916.³⁶ Military authorities also waged a number of legal battles against European *souteneurs* of various nationalities who had been active in the sex trade in Egypt.³⁷ Combined with the British

³⁴ "Report by Major Hopkinson, Commandant of Alexandria City Police, March 19, 1916," FO 141/466/2, The National Archives of the UK Government.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Francesca Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains," 119.

³⁷ See "Salvatore Spiteri for Living on the Earnings of Prostitution, 1913," FO 841/138, The National Archives of the UK Government; "Giuseppe Vassallo for Living on the Earnings of Prostitution 1914," "Giuseppe Mifsud for Living on the Earnings of Prostitution, 1914," "Alex Tanti for Permitting the Use and Smoking of Hashish, 1914," "Alex Tanti for Living Wholly or Partly on the Earnings of Prostitution, 1914," FO 841/146, The National Archives of the UK Government; "Pasquale Magri for Living Wholly or in Part on the Earnings of Prostitution, 1917," FO 841/168, The National Archives of the UK Government; "James Kelly Alias Hughes for Living on Proceeds of Prostitution, 1919," FO 841/186, The National Archives of the UK Government; and "Rex v. John Chas. Shalders for Living on Proceeds of Prostitution, 1921," FO 841/205, The National Archives of the UK Government.

army's monopolization of shipping and railway transport for military purposes, these policies contributed to a temporary decline in both international and domestic trafficking during the war. This, in turn, contributed to the increased role of local women in Alexandria's commercial sex industry. The records of the 1920 murder case indicate that streetwalking became more common during the war, particularly among married women. Streetwalkers found their clients while peddling goods in the marketplace or street, and they would usually take their clients to a clandestine brothel or private home, relinquishing half their pay to the owner of the room. Other women preferred to find their clients directly through clandestine brothels, which secured their clientele via proximity to a well-frequented venue and/or connections to powerful people in the local community. Women played the most prominent role in the procuring business during the war years, as female brothel owners took on the responsibility of finding sex workers for their large clientele.

The effect of wartime colonial exploitation on native male workers and peasants in Egypt also created conditions for the spread of clandestine prostitution and the restructuring of Alexandria's sex trade. In 1917, colonial military authorities began an aggressive recruitment/conscription campaign throughout Egypt to gather men for the Labor Corps, which provided manual labor for the Allies in the theaters of war.³⁸ Alexandria was one of the sites where men were medically examined, vaccinated and treated before they were sent abroad, and secret brothels quickly began to appear around the military camps. Many day laborers in Alexandria joined the Egyptian Labor Corps during the second half of the war, but few were able to send

³⁸ Mario Ruiz, "The Egyptian Labor Corps," *World War I in the Middle East and North Africa*, accessed January 30, 2015, <https://blogs.commonsgorgetown.edu/world-war-i-in-the-middle-east/seminar-participants/web-projects/mario-ruiz-the-egyptian-labor-corps/>

money back to their families in their absence. This situation, combined with the rise in the cost of living during the war, led married women and underage girls to turn to the commercial sex industry in increasing numbers. Since they were not allowed to obtain licenses due to their age and marital status, and since a license was not a desirable option for those who sought to engage in sex work temporarily, married women and girls were more likely to turn to clandestine sex work. Furthermore, since transient sex workers preferred to cater to transient markets, it was more advantageous for them to operate in close proximity to military camps rather than in licensed quarters.

One of the secret brothels that appeared in close proximity to a British military camp was known among sex workers and clients as “The Camp.” The brothel was operated by Raya and Sakina, and although it was not the first brothel they attempted to open during the war, it was the most successful.³⁹ The brothel attracted soldiers of various nationalities, including British, Indian, and Australian soldiers, as well as native men who worked for the Egyptian Labor Corps. Raya became the primary procurer of sex workers for the brothel’s large clientele, and it was her success in bringing a wide variety of women to work at the brothel that made her one of the most well-known procurers in al-Labbān, Alexandria. In addition to procuring widows and divorced women, some of them under the age of 18, Raya also managed to procure married women from various social classes. Raya notes that at its height, “The Camp” had 22 sex workers, all of whom were technically self-employed, paying her half of what they earned as a fee for

³⁹ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 149.

conducting business at her brothel.⁴⁰ She also solicited streetwalkers to bring their clients to her brothel, offering them a discounted fee if they agreed to come regularly.⁴¹

From Raya's testimony, one of the most striking features of "The Camp" was the relative absence of male involvement in the operation of the business. Although Raya and Sakina did employ a low-ranking police officer as well as a local strongmen to protect them and their sex workers from abusive clients, Raya spoke fondly of "The Camp" as a period in which she had complete control over her business and her profits.⁴² Although it is impossible to understand the full nature of the relationship between Raya and the sex workers at "The Camp" because most of them were murdered in 1920, the fact that her business was thriving during the war suggests that Raya did not need a monopoly over her sex workers in order to profit. Compared to the picture of the postwar sex trade that emerges from the records, it appears that the sex workers at Raya's brothels exercised a significant yet short-lived degree of independence and mobility during the war.

Another striking feature of "The Camp" was the relative absence of police harassment. Although this may be because Raya and Sakina had allegedly bribed the low-ranking police officer who was stationed in their neighborhood, the behavior of the police appears to have been erratic throughout the war.⁴³ According to the prostitution regulations in Egypt, unlicensed sex workers and brothel owners were subject to the payment of fines and possible imprisonment

⁴⁰ Ibid., 151.

⁴¹ Ibid., 299.

⁴² 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 199.

⁴³ Judge McBarnet's 1919 report supports this observation, noting that the Egyptian Police was subject to vacillating wartime policies regarding how to deal with the spread of prostitution. See McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 5.

when apprehended. However, Raya and Sakina were sometimes allowed to operate their clandestine business for long periods of time with minimal police interference; at other times, they were subject to frequent police raids. Sometimes, even after successive police raids, the sisters were able to continue their operations, and at other times, they were forced to close their business and move to another location. The records of the murder case indicate that their brothels were raided only when a neighbor complained, and thus they relied on local strongmen to bully their neighbors into silence. Yet the records also show that even when they were forced to shut down their brothel, they never paid a fine or served time in jail, suggesting that the Alexandria police did not strictly enforce the laws against unlicensed prostitution during the war. This stands in stark contrast to other illegal activities for which Sakina was imprisoned, such as taking unwanted horse meat from the British military camp in Sidi Bishr and selling it to the local population.⁴⁴

The inconsistency with which the police handled unlicensed brothels during the war was accompanied by inconsistent and counterproductive policies against streetwalkers. The police were known to occasionally raid bars during the war and send all the female patrons to the hospital to be checked for venereal disease.⁴⁵ Yet these raids also appear to have been prompted by complaints from the local population, and sex workers could avoid detention if they had protection from local strongmen, low-ranking police officers, or even, in some cases, from

⁴⁴ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 705.

⁴⁵ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 309.

soldiers.⁴⁶ Thus, although Sakina was an alcoholic who spent the majority of her time in bars, she always managed to avoid police raids.

Given the fact that police statistics on clandestine prostitution included all of the women who were arrested in both public and private spaces during police raids, and given the fact that many clandestine sex workers in this case were never detained in these police raids, the statistics provided in police reports cannot be considered an accurate measure of clandestine prostitution. Furthermore, given that police raids were usually prompted by complaints from neighbors, an increase in police raids may indicate a heightened social awareness rather than an increase in prevalence. For these reasons, statistics regarding clandestine prostitution are not accurate indicators of its prevalence. Although it is difficult to prove that clandestine prostitution increased or decreased at any given historical moment, historians can use a variety of historical sources to analyze the conditions that might contribute to the spread of clandestine prostitution. Thus, given that wartime conditions created both a higher demand for commercial sex as well as an increased availability of women who did not have adequate means of supporting themselves, and given that licensed prostitution was subject to increased regulation during the war and was not a viable means of temporary employment for married women and underage girls, it is likely that clandestine prostitution was more prevalent during the war than it had been in previous decades.

⁴⁶ See "Note re Prostitutes," Commandant's Office, Cairo, March 20, 1916, FO 141/466/2, The National Archives of the UK Government, which states that some soldiers would step in to protect prostitutes (and pimps) during police raids.

Prostitution and Social Class

Scholarship on prostitution in modern Egypt has exhibited a tendency to single out women from poor or ‘economically weak’ families as comprising the vast majority of women who engaged in sex work.⁴⁷ This observation stems from a reliance on legal records in which poor women figure most prominently. However, as indicated by the records of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case, elite women also engaged in commercial sex yet were more likely to do so clandestinely. It is thus less common to come across elite women in Egyptian court cases dealing with sexual relations. This should not lead one to assume that elite women did not have grievances or that they did not engage in certain trades, such as commercial sex work or entertainment.⁴⁸ In some cases, elite women chose to engage in commercial sex in order to improve their lifestyle or maintain their lifestyle during periods of economic hardship, such as World War I.

Due to the fact that the 1920 Alexandria murders involved a large number of suspects and witnesses, the legal records give us insight into the lives of some elite women who do not regularly appear in court records dealing with commercial sex. One of the suspects in the 1920 Alexandria murder case was a woman named ‘Adīla who came from a landowning family and was considered by many of the suspects to be from a higher social class due to her style of dress

⁴⁷ See Francesca Biancani, “International Migration and Sex Work in Early Twentieth Century Cairo,” in *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age*, ed. Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayech and Avner Wishnitzer (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 115; See also Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women*. Biancani focuses on white migrant sex workers, while Kozma focuses on rural migrants and newly manumitted slaves. Although these populations certainly came from economically weak families, the authors use their study of these marginalized groups to make more general observations about sex work. This overlooks the fact that historical sources often reference the existence of wealthy, elite prostitutes among both European and native communities in Egypt, and that observations about white and native subalterns are not necessarily applicable to other socioeconomic groups who engaged in this trade.

⁴⁸ Egyptian studies of prostitution have a greater tendency to focus on elite women in the sex trade than Western scholarship. For example, Emad Hilal notes that elite women figure prominently in Egyptian studies of the sex trade in the early twentieth century. However, it is also important to note that this may be due to the tendency of middle class nationalists to overemphasize the ‘debauchery’ of Egyptian elites. This critique is not directed at Emad Hilal but rather at the 1934 study he is relying on. See Hilal, *Al-Baghāya fī Miṣr*, 62.

and family background.⁴⁹ Although ‘Adīla was a divorced woman, she claimed that she had inherited land from her father and was receiving a profit of 5 to 6 riyal from the land every month in addition to financial support from her sons, who worked in a variety of industries.⁵⁰ She thus presented herself as a woman who had sufficient economic resources and was not dependent on work to make a living. Yet despite her higher social standing, ‘Adīla visited Raya and Sakina’s brothel in the poverty-stricken neighborhood of Hāret al-Nagāh on several occasions to engage in clandestine sex work. And despite her apparent lack of need for employment, ‘Adīla expected to be paid for her services, as one of her customers indicated in his testimony.⁵¹ In fact, ‘Adīla expected to be paid more for her services than working-class women, which suggests that social standing increased a sex worker’s desirability.⁵² ‘Adīla’s sisters were also sex workers and entertainers, a further indication that her engagement in commercial sex was not simply an aberration among women of her social class.⁵³ The picture of the sex trade presented by ‘Adīla’s

⁴⁹ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 214.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 161. By the early twentieth century, the riyal was a money of account rather than a physical currency. 1 riyal was equivalent to 20 Egyptian piasters. See Charles Augustus Maude Fennell, *The Stanford Dictionary of Anglicised Words and Phrases* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1892), 677.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 184 - 188. Some Egyptian scholars have implied that women (particularly married women) of higher social standing who visited brothels did so due to rapacious sexual desires rather than financial motivations. See ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 157 and ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 44. However, these middle class assumptions about prostitution are teleological. As shown in the case of ‘Adīla, women of higher social standing who had sex with men in brothels expected to be paid for their services, and it was generally considered dishonorable for a woman to have sex with a man without receiving some form of financial compensation. This was the same logic that governed the adjudication of rape cases under shari’a law, as the absence of financial compensation was a precondition for alleging rape, and the solution to rape was often financial compensation for the woman whose body had been violated. During this period, the only men who were regularly exempted from paying sex workers and brothel owners were the local strongmen, known as *fitiwwa*, whose social status and power usually granted them unrestricted access to the bodies of sex workers. The *fitiwwa* will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵² See ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 128, which states that ‘Adīla used to charge her clients more than the usual rate.

⁵³ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 353.

family challenges our tendency to view sex work as an act of economic desperation and suggests that it was an occupation open to women of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Upon learning from ‘Adīla’s client that she was an elite woman who occasionally engaged in clandestine sex work, the investigator immediately struck her name off the suspect list, despite the fact that Raya insisted she had also been an accomplice to the murders. Although ‘Adīla had initially lied to the investigator about her involvement with Raya and Sakina’s brothels, the investigator attributed her lie to the normal behavior of a respectable woman of high social standing who would do everything in her power to keep her illicit sexual activities a secret.⁵⁴ Her denial was thus interpreted as a symbol of female modesty and stood in stark contrast to Sakina’s testimonies, which were allegedly characterized by a brash openness about her sex life. It was precisely because ‘Adīla had lied about her sexual activities that she fit the socially accepted image of a respectable elite woman who occasionally engaged in clandestine sex work.

Although ‘Adīla was by no means an economically disempowered woman, it is important to note the way in which World War I had affected all socioeconomic classes. According to colonial sources, by 1919, the cost of living in Egypt had risen by 110 - 150%; Egyptian sources put the figure at about 200%.⁵⁵ This significantly reduced people’s buying power in Egypt and led many women to search for ways to supplement their families’ income. Shopkeepers were particularly hard hit by the war as their trade was crippled by the British army’s monopolization of shipping routes, new taxes on imports, and the astronomical rise in the price of food. In this

⁵⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 165.

⁵⁵ See “1918 Report for The International Association for the Repression of the White Slave Trade,” 16; See also Beinín, “Formation of the Egyptian Working Class,” 17.

context, it is not surprising that a number of the women who engaged in clandestine sex work in Raya and Sakina's brothels were from higher socioeconomic classes. It was likely these wartime economic conditions that brought Nabawiya bint Gum'a, the 50-year old wife of an oil merchant, to Raya and Sakina's brothel during the war.⁵⁶ As an older, petite bourgeois woman who had been married for thirty years, Nabawiya was one of the most atypical sights at Raya and Sakina's working-class brothels and thus one of the strongest symbols of the way in which wartime conditions brought people from various social classes together.

Employment Opportunities for Women

As indicated above, women of various socioeconomic classes worked when they needed or wanted money. However, even during World War I, the poor were disproportionately represented among working women. Most of the jobs available to women during this period were working-class jobs which were not desirable by anyone's standards. Therefore, the tendency to single out sex work as an act of desperation is historically inaccurate, as women in financial straits worked in a variety of occupations, including domestic service, tailoring, hospital work, and street peddling. The popular perception that sex work signifies a greater lack of female agency than other forms of employment does not fit the picture that emerges from the historical records, for as with other trades, it was the attempt to exploit the labor of sex workers and not the nature of sex work itself that imposed limits on women's agency.

The fact that women of various socioeconomic classes engaged in sex work raises questions about the nature of women's work and why some forms of work are seen as more or

⁵⁶ 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 154.

less desirable than others. Current understandings of prostitution have largely been shaped by middle class assumptions, which posit the sale of a woman's body as a form of degradation. Projecting these views onto earlier historical periods often results in inaccurate representations and apologetic explanations for women's engagement in commercial sex. In the early twentieth century, there is no evidence that women saw sex work as a less desirable form of labor than any of the other employment opportunities available to them; in fact, given the prevalence of sex work, there is reason to believe that they preferred it over other forms of labor. To understand why sex work became more prevalent during periods in which women needed to work, one must look to the other employment options that were available to women at that time.

Other than the few middle-class jobs available to the small minority of women in Alexandria with some degree of formal education or training, mainly as clerks, teachers, telephone operators and skilled nurses,⁵⁷ clandestine sex work was considered one of the highest-paying jobs for women in early twentieth-century Alexandria. In the poorest neighborhoods of Alexandria, a sex worker usually made between one-fourth to one-half of a riyal after commission from each of her clients, and she sometimes made four times as much when the client was a European.⁵⁸ The amount of gold that some sex workers wore in public was a testament to the potential profitability of the trade. According to the gold dealers interviewed

⁵⁷ See "1918 Report for The International Association for the Repression of the White Slave Trade," 14. This report is based on a study of female employment in Cairo, as no comparable study has yet been found for Alexandria. Some of the findings are applicable to Alexandria, although the number of middle-class jobs available to women was likely lower in Alexandria than Cairo due to the fact that Cairo was the capital city. With regards to middle-class jobs, this study documents 170 female workers in government departments, 65 in offices, 73 in banks, 445 in schools and as governesses, and 205 in hospitals, although the study does not distinguish between skilled and unskilled labor in hospitals. These numbers include both European and native working women. According to census records from 1917, there were approximately 385,000 women in Cairo during this period.

⁵⁸ See 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 180. Most of the European men who frequented brothels in the working-class neighborhoods of Alexandria were sailors and soldiers.

during the investigation, sex workers were known for wearing the thickest gold bracelets, and each time they accumulated more money, they would trade their bracelet in for a thicker bracelet or buy a new piece of gold jewelry. Although this may have been seen as one of the best ways to safeguard the wealth that they had accumulated, the ostentatious displays of gold on the sex worker's body also functioned as a symbol of their success, desirability and social mobility.

Many women who engaged in clandestine sex work did so temporarily or occasionally to supplement their family's income. Women with small children and sick family members were particularly attracted to the trade as it generally enabled them to make more money in less time than their regular job, granting them more time to care for their dependents. Petit bourgeois women were also attracted to the sex trade due to the lack of alternative employment opportunities for members of their social class. Some of the women who worked at Raya and Sakina's brothel during the war thus worked simultaneously as street peddlers or tailors, some had previously worked as domestic servants, and others were wives of small shopkeepers and craftsmen.⁵⁹ Tailors worked either on an individual basis or as subcontractors for large companies; the latter appears to have been a trend that began during the war. Street peddlers engaged in a wide range of activities, from selling produce and fuel to telling fortunes. A number of street peddlers also engaged in streetwalking, as their jobs put them in the best position to solicit clients.

Servant brokers were in direct competition with procurers for young women and girls.

Domestic servants usually worked full-time for European or wealthy native families and received

⁵⁹ Factory workers do not appear in this case, as there were few factories in Alexandria at this time. The only factories mentioned are the cotton press, whose operations were significantly reduced during the war, and a cigarette factory, which primarily employed Greeks.

very little financial compensation. For this reason, many domestic servants in Alexandria were young girls from poor families who worked to supplement their families' income.⁶⁰ 'Aisha, one of Raya's full-time sex workers, testified that she had made 2 riyal per month as a domestic servant for an Italian family, which was far less than what she needed to care for her ill mother.⁶¹ Emad Hilal argues that although domestic service was seen as more respectable than sex work, the two professions did not differ much because servants were also sexually exploited and abused. The investigation records of the 1920 Alexandria murder case support this argument because Raya and Sakina's full-time, underage sex workers used to perform other services for them as well, such as washing clothes and taking out the trash. Yet this argument fails to distinguish between sex workers of different social classes. Social class (and to a certain extent age) played an important role in the treatment of sex workers, as poorer sex workers were usually subject to more severe forms of exploitation. For poor women and girls, the line between a sex worker and a servant was fluid and ambiguous.

Some of the women who figured prominently in this case also owned their own businesses, mostly coffee shops, bars and restaurants. One of Sakina's best friends, Maryam al-Shamiyya, ran a successful coffee shop and bar near Sakina's home. At one point during the war, Sakina attempted to do the same, and Maryam loaned her tables and chairs to help her get started.⁶² Yet working-class women often found it difficult to muster sufficient capital for their enterprise, and Sakina's business venture proved to be a short-lived experiment.

⁶⁰ See Hilal, *Al-Baghāya fī Miṣr*, 65.

⁶¹ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 159.

⁶² 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 168.

Working-class women who preferred more stable sources of income also had recourse to unskilled labor employment in hospitals. According to hospital employee records from this period, the majority of female hospital employees in Alexandria were unskilled nurses or laundry-women.⁶³ Unskilled nurses (*tamargiyya*) worked long hours at low rates of pay, earning a little over a pound a month, while wet nurses earned significantly less. Moreover, those who worked in European hospitals or in hospitals with a European director were usually subject to racialized gender discrimination and were expected to conform to European gender norms. In the new European lock hospital which opened in the Muharram Bey district of Alexandria in 1917, native women working as unskilled nurses were regularly fired for “bad behavior” shortly after their hire date.⁶⁴ The vulnerabilities of being a working-class native women in a colonized society made the few employment opportunities available in European-controlled institutions both precarious and less desirable.

As shown above, clandestine sex work offered working women greater flexibility and potential profitability than many of the other jobs available to them during this period. Because the majority of historical sources that document the experiences of sex workers are legal records, historians are frequently exposed only to the grievances of sex workers or to accusations against them. This raises the question of whether sex workers were more dissatisfied with their jobs than other working women. Criminal court registers from this period for both Cairo and Alexandria note that the suicide rate of women and teenage girls was particularly high in red light districts,

⁶³ *Daftar Qayd al-Khidma al-Sā'ira bi 'Usbitāliyāt Iskandirayya min 1916 - 1918* [Employee Register for the Alexandria Hospital, 1916 - 1918], Public Health Records, Egyptian National Archives.

⁶⁴ *Muḥāfazat Iskandirayya Daftar Qayd Asmā' wi Tawārīkh Tu'ayyin al-Khidma bi 'Usbitāliyāt al-'Āhirāt* [Alexandria Governorate Employee Register for Lock Hospital Established in 1917], Public Health Records, Egyptian National Archives. Some of the men who performed unskilled labor in this hospital were also fired for “bad behavior,” although the rate of women fired for this reason was significantly higher.

yet there is no way to ascertain from the court registers that these ‘suicides’ were not actually murders, especially since many of the deaths that were later deemed to be suicides had suspects in the cases. Given that the majority of armed robberies in interwar Alexandria were never prosecuted due to insufficient evidence, it is quite possible that many murders were written off as suicides due to lack of evidence against the suspects.⁶⁵ Although by the early twentieth century, advances in forensic medicine enabled medical practitioners in Egypt to make more accurate assessments of the cause of death, advancements in fingerprinting were not yet sufficient to ascertain whether or not others had been involved.⁶⁶

The frequent appearance of sex workers in legal records also raises the question of whether sex work was more dangerous than other trades in early twentieth-century Alexandria. Although the majority of the victims of the 1920 Alexandria murder case were independent sex workers, among them were a servant broker in her 50s and a gas peddler in her 60s, and the state prosecutor did not find sufficient evidence that they were engaged in the commercial sex trade. What they had in common with the other murder victims was the fact that they were highly mobile working women whose work brought them into various neighborhoods controlled by different local strongmen and interwar trafficking networks. The increased mobility of women during this period was a threat to existing forms of local sovereignty, as the interwar years marked a rise in the visibility and strength of local networks whose growth was spawned by the

⁶⁵ See *Juz' Thānī Sijil Qayd al-Jinayyāt bi Muḥāfazat al-Iskandirayya 1926* [1926 Alexandria Criminal Court Register] and *Sijil Janḥ wi Jinayyat fī Miṣr 1919 - 1920* [Cairo Criminal Court Registers, 1919 - 1920], Interior Ministry Files, Egyptian National Archives.

⁶⁶ For a history of forensic medicine in Egypt, see Khaled Fahmy, “The Anatomy of Justice: Forensic Medicine and Criminal Law in Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” *Islamic Law and Society* 6 (1999). See also Khaled Fahmy, “Women, Medicine and Power in Nineteenth-Century Egypt,” in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), which discusses the gendered politics of disputes between medical practitioners and nurses over the causes of death in cases of suspected murder.

gaps and discontinuities of nation-state encroachment. The murder case was thus partly a product of the contentious relationship between subaltern forms of sovereignty and nation-state sovereignty in interwar Egypt.

The *Fitiwwa* and the Sex Trade

The centrality of Alexandria's local strongmen, the *fitiwwa*, to the investigation of the 1920 Alexandria murder case indicates that they were integral to both the prosperity and regulation of Alexandria's sex trade. The 1920 Alexandria serial murder case provides one of the richest sources about the *fitiwwa* in al-Labbān, Alexandria because it is a rare moment in which multiple *fitiwwa* speak about themselves and about each other. It is also a rare moment in which a large number of witnesses speak - or beg not to speak - about the *fitiwwa* before a representative of the Egyptian state. It thus enables a reading of the *fitiwwa* from below, as they were seen by both the people in their community and by each other. This section examines the figure of the *fitiwwa* as it exists in both Egyptian popular memory and the narrative of state documents, and interrogates the sociopolitical meanings that can be ascribed to the strong presence of this figure in the sex trade.

Much of our understanding of Egypt's local strongmen, the *fitiwwa*, comes from popular fiction. Naguib Mahfouz, the most famous Egyptian author in the second half of the twentieth century, writes profusely about the *fitiwwa* as the quintessential subaltern hero who, for centuries, bravely protected his neighborhood against the threat of outsiders.⁶⁷ Yet Mahfouz's fiction is also particularly concerned with charting the decline of the *fitiwwa*'s sociopolitical

⁶⁷ See Naguib Mahfouz, *The Harafish* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997); See also the 1953 film called *Raya and Sakina* written by Naguib Mahfouz.

legitimacy. In his novel *The Harafish*, these subaltern sovereigns lose their moral compass in the early twentieth century and, through their involvement in the illicit drug and sex trade, become corrupt local agents who do more harm than good to the neighborhoods they control. In Mahfouz's 1953 reconstruction of the 1920 Alexandria murder case, the corrupt *fitiwwa* ultimately lose their subaltern sovereignty to middle-class nationalists as the nation-state solves the murder case and secures its position as the only legitimate sovereign of the Egyptian masses.

Mahfouz's fictional reconstructions closely reflect the nationalist historiography of the *fitiwwa* which developed in interwar Egypt. According to this historiography, the *fitiwwa* is a longstanding, urban Egyptian tradition, and each neighborhood in Egyptian cities had a *fitiwwa* or rival *fitiwwa* whose job was to protect their community from outsiders. The title of *fitiwwa* could be inherited from a family member or earned through winning street battles. The *fitiwwa* once acted as a local police force and arbiters of justice, and were known as Robinhood figures who would take from the rich and give to the poor.⁶⁸ The nationalist narrative emphasizes the role of colonialism in the corruption of this longstanding tradition, highlighting the way in which the British empowered these local sovereigns as a counterpart to the nationalists by giving them money, food and capitulatory privileges. These colonial privileges consequently corrupted the *fitiwwa* and transformed them into *baltagiyya*, hired thugs who expected money in exchange for protection and had no real status or respect in their communities.⁶⁹ In contemporary Egyptian literature, the modern *fitiwwa* as *baltagi* stands in contrast to the figure of the premodern *fitiwwa*, who was the natural protector of his community by virtue of his hegemony. The figure of the

⁶⁸ See 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 98 - 102.

⁶⁹ See Sayyid Ṣadīq 'Abd al-Fattāh, *Tarīkh Fitiwwāt Miṣr wi Ma'ārikhum al-Dammiyya [A History of the Egyptian Fitiwwa and Their Bloody Battles]* (Cairo: Madbuli, 1995), 7.

fitiwwa thus emerges in the interwar period as at once a hero of the past and a villain of the present, a subaltern sovereign whose corruption by colonial forces legitimizes the encroachment of the nation-state.

One of the first attempts to challenge contemporary readings of this subaltern figure is Wilson Jacob's study of *al-futuwwa*.⁷⁰ Jacob's rendering of the term in formal language as opposed to the vernacular is central to his concern with performativity and to the way in which the slippage between the formal *futuwwa* and the vernacular *fitiwwa* reinforces the modern (and violent) transformation of this subaltern figure into a 'thug.' Jacob's study shows that the criminalization of the *futuwwa* in the interwar period was central to the project of modern state-building and the formation of the Egyptian middle class. This study seeks to build on Jacob's work by looking at the *fitiwwa* from below and examining their sociopolitical role in subaltern communities in the interwar period. To do so requires a further breakdown of the colonial and nationalist assumptions about the *fitiwwa* highlighted by Jacob's study.

Modern attempts to render the *fitiwwa* as part of a longstanding Egyptian tradition are an integral component of nationalist historiography. Charting the genealogy of the *fitiwwa* is problematic, particularly because, as Robert Irwin notes, there is no mention of them in the early modern period.⁷¹ This raises the question of the relationship between *al-futuwwa* as a concept and *fitiwwa* as modern subjects, a relationship which is presumed in Jacob's work. This study suggests that what Jacob believes to be a slippage between *futuwwa* and *fitiwwa* is rather a historical disjunction between the medieval *futuwwa* brotherhoods and the modern *fitiwwa*, as

⁷⁰ See Jacob, *Working out Egypt*, 225 - 262.

⁷¹ See Robert Irwin, "Futuwwa: Chivalry and Gangsterism in Medieval Cairo," in *Muqarnas* 21 (2004), 161 - 170.

the role of these subalterns in local communities in the interwar period differs significantly from their role in the medieval period. Unlike the modern *fitiwwa*, the medieval *futuwwa* do not appear to have been involved in local governance. What seems to tie the modern *fitiwwa* to the medieval *futuwwa* brotherhoods is their association with marginalized communities and their shared characteristics of strength and bravery, which sometimes spilled over into criminality. But the type of local sovereignty exercised by the modern *fitiwwa* appears to have no relation to the medieval *futuwwa* brotherhoods, and thus, until further research on this topic proves otherwise, the *fitiwwa* who appear in the 1920 Alexandria murder case must be treated as a uniquely modern form of local sovereignty, one which gained increased prominence in the interwar period.

Although the concept of *al-futuwwa* may have had its roots in medieval Sufi traditions, the rise of the modern *fitiwwa* as local sovereigns is not a corrupted vestige of an ancient tradition but rather a product of the rise of the modern state and the imposition of modern forms of sovereignty onto a historic concept.

The first modern attempt to write the *fitiwwa* into Egyptian history is a series of articles written in the 1920s by Yūsuf Abū Haggāg, an alleged *fitiwwa* and reformed criminal.⁷² The articles were first published in a newspaper called *Lisān al-‘Arab* and later compiled into a book called *Mudhākīrāt Fitiwwa (The Memoirs of a Fitiwwa)*. Although Elliot Colla questions the legitimacy of this text on the basis that similar memoirs began to appear about other illiterate subalterns during this period, namely orphans, maids and prostitutes,⁷³ the records of the 1920 murder case suggest that the *fitiwwa* encompassed a wide range of social classes in the interwar

⁷² See Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 354 - 355.

⁷³ See Elliot Colla, “Anxious Advocacy: The Novel, the Law, and Extrajudicial Appeals in Egypt,” *Public Culture* 17:3 (Fall 2005), 429.

period and that by this time, some non-elites could read and write. One of the *fitiwwa* suspects in the 1920 Alexandria murder case, Muḥammad Khafāga, owned a successful dairy business, and the carpenter who worked in Raya’s neighborhood was known to read the newspaper every morning.⁷⁴ Hanan Hammad’s study of the *fitiwwa* in Mahalla al-Kubra also indicates that this title was held by men of varying socioeconomic means, as one of the *fitiwwa* families she discusses consisted of “cotton brokers and real estate owners.”⁷⁵ The title of *fitiwwa* in the modern period was thus not limited to the lower classes as commonly assumed and depicted in fiction. Furthermore, geographic boundaries between members of different social classes was not rigid in the early interwar period, and neighborhoods often contained members of different social classes. Working-class men and women lived side by side with the lower middle classes in many parts of Alexandria, and thus it was possible to find both a working-class *fitiwwa*, such as the donkey cart driver ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf, living in the same neighborhood as a business-owning *fitiwwa* like Muḥammad Khafāga, engaging with each other as both friends and rivals.⁷⁶

Given that class is not a static category, and given the degree of power and privilege that the *fitiwwa* exercised in their communities, it is quite possible if not likely that some *fitiwwa* were becoming middle-class nationalists in the interwar period while others retained their subalternity. The ambiguities surrounding the authorship of *Mudhākirāt Fitiwwa* raises questions about the potential entrance of some *fitiwwa* into the middle class during the interwar period and the origins of the nationalist narrative about this figure. What happens when the subaltern loses

⁷⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 183.

⁷⁵ Hammad, “Mechanizing People, Localizing Modernity,” 299.

⁷⁶ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 183 - 188.

his subalternity and begins to speak? Does the narrative of the socially-mobile subaltern challenge elite readings of his subalternity or does it validate them? Was it possible for a *fitiwwa* moving into the middle class to challenge the nationalist assumptions about sovereignty and political legitimacy that shaped popular discourse about his tradition or did these assumptions also begin to shape his own understanding of his tradition? It is possible that current middle-class understandings of the *fitiwwa*, which date back to the interwar period, were a product of the *fitiwwa*'s social mobility and an attempt to reconcile their understandings of themselves with colonial and nationalist assumptions about the causes and manifestations of subaltern criminality. Yūsuf Abū Haggāg's experiment with subaltern narration thus became a self-representation grounded in nationalist historiography.

In attempting to construct a linear historical narrative about the decline of the *fitiwwa*, nationalist historiography has bifurcated the image of the modern 'thug' from the image of the ancient 'hero.' This bifurcation extends to the concept of *al-futuwwa* as a performance of masculinity, as the modern thug became a violent abuser while the ancient hero became a compassionate protector. A gendered reading of this nationalist narrative suggests that *al-futuwwa* was central to modern, middle-class constructions of masculinity, which were grounded in a protectionist and paternalistic discourse. In an attempt to challenge modern notions of the *fitiwwa* as 'thug,' Hanan Hammad's dissertation presents the *fitiwwa* as protectors of sex workers and the *baltagiyya* as abusers.⁷⁷ Yet this dichotomy does not reflect the way in which subaltern men and women in al-Labbān, Alexandria spoke about their *fitiwwa* during the investigation of

⁷⁷ Hammad, "Mechanizing People, Localizing Modernity," 298 - 303. Although Hammad's observations are based on the small brothel quarter of Mahalla al-Kubra, she speaks at this point about Egyptian historiography of the prostitution underworld in general, and critiques the focus on the abuse of sex workers as a "morally driven scholarship" ... "which does not lack support among western scholars."

the 1920 murder case, which brings into question the historical accuracy of the dichotomy. The two *fitiwwa* who were executed in the 1920 Alexandria murder case, ‘Urābī Hassan and ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf, protected Raya’s brothel from unfriendly neighbors by virtue of their status as *fitiwwa*, yet according to the testimonies of Raya and Sakina’s sex workers, they also frequently beat and raped young women.⁷⁸ Raya also testified that both the *fitiwwa* and her husband used to beat her into submission,⁷⁹ and that two of the murder victims had complained about ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s attempts to take their money and jewelry shortly before they were killed.⁸⁰ Although one might be tempted to argue that ‘Abd al-Rāziq and ‘Urābī were actually *baltagiyya* rather than *fitiwwa*, all of the suspects and witnesses referred to them as *fitiwwa* and many had similar complaints about them. The bifurcation of the *fitiwwa* as protector from the *baltagiyya* as abuser thus appears both historically inaccurate and problematic from a feminist perspective because the power that is used to protect is the same power that is used to abuse.

Although the bifurcation of *fitiwwa* and *baltagiyya* appears to contradict popular understandings of the *fitiwwa* in early interwar Alexandria, Hammad’s observations about the *fitiwwa* in Mahalla al-Kubra coheres in other important ways with the representations of the *fitiwwa* in the legal records of the 1920 Alexandria murder case. Hammad discusses the *fitiwwa* as leaders of large labor gangs (*‘usba*) in Mahalla al-Kubra, showing that the *fitiwwa* had not only political power but also economic power in their communities, as they controlled people’s access to jobs and resources. In the investigation of the 1920 murder case, the *fitiwwa* were presented as those who had the ability to shape other people’s opinions, decisions, and behavior,

⁷⁸ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 219.

⁷⁹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 370.

⁸⁰ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 234; ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 187.

either by virtue of their popularity and respectability, by terrifying people into submission, or by controlling their access to resources. When the brother of one of the murder victims, Zannūba bint Muḥammad Mūsa, conducted his own investigation into the disappearance of his sister, he learned that a fisherman in al-Labbān who frequented Raya and Sakina's brothel in Ḥāret al-Nagāh had seen a *fitiwwa* by the name of Muḥammad al-Sammāk beating Zannūba in the brothel shortly before her disappearance.⁸¹ Yet according to the brother's testimony, the fisherman refused to tell his story to the police because Muḥammad al-Sammāk was the head of a large group of Ṣa'īdī fisherman who could destroy the man's work opportunities. Muḥammad al-Sammāk was thus never investigated as a suspect in the 1920 murder case due to his community's refusal to testify against him. This further indicates that the power exercised by the *fitiwwa* was simultaneously used to protect and abuse the members of their community.

In neighborhoods where licensed or clandestine prostitution was prevalent, the *fitiwwa* naturally played an important role in the sex trade given their position of power in the community and their role in local governance. Although the *fitiwwa* were usually not active procurers, they often became procurers by virtue of their social status and power. During the investigation of the murder case, one woman stated that Raya had told her she could not refuse the *fitiwwa* because they exercised a great deal of power and influence.⁸² The success of a brothel

⁸¹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 140.

⁸² *asāyithum ṭawīla*, which literally means "they carry a long stick." See 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 369. It is important to note that despite the role of the *fitiwwa* in the sex trade, they were not referred to as pimps by their communities because that was seen as a disreputable occupation. The title of 'pimp' was only given to men and women who ran brothels and procured clients and sex workers. The *fitiwwa* were seen as the protectors of sex workers and brothel owners, and this division of labor between the procurer and the protector in the Egyptian sex trade differs significantly from Western accounts of the prostitution industry, where the 'pimp' functioned as both the procurer and the protector. However, although local communities perceived a division between the role of the *fitiwwa* and the role of the pimp, this division was much more fluid in practice, as *fitiwwa* were also known to bring their friends and lovers to the brothels they frequented, sometimes securing their lover's involvement in the sex trade.

owner often depended on establishing good relations with the *fitiwwa*, and the presence of a *fitiwwa* in a brothel could increase its popularity in the community. For this reason, Raya actively sought to procure Muḥammad Khafāga as a client in order to elevate the status of her brothel in Ḥāret al-Nagāh. At the same time, the abusive tendencies of the *fitiwwa* could cause a brothel owner to lose business, and it was in these situations that brothel owners benefited from the existence of rival *fitiwwa*. ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s notoriety as a thief and violent rapist was of particular concern to Raya, and she was known to turn to his rival *fitiwwa*, Muḥammad Khafāga, whenever his abusive tendencies created significant problems. Such was the case when early one morning, Raya and her neighbors found ‘Abd al-Rāziq violently beating a young girl who made her living off collecting used cigarette butts for an independent cigarette maker in Alexandria.⁸³ The girl claimed that ‘Abd al-Rāziq had slept with her that night and had refused to pay her, and when she demanded payment, he proceeded to beat and rape her for hours. Raya and her neighbor immediately turned to Muḥammad Khafāga, who then gave the girl some money and promised to discipline ‘Abd al-Rāziq.⁸⁴ Brothels thus figured prominently in local politics, and a brothel owner’s political savvy was essential to the survival of her business.

The relationship between masculinity and control of women’s bodies also meant that involvement in the sex trade could augment a *fitiwwa*’s power. From newspaper accounts and popular fiction, it appears that the *fitiwwa* who lacked economic and political power were usually the ones most involved in the sex trade, compensating for their lack of control over resources by controlling the movement and earnings of women in their neighborhood. Yet this portrayal of the

⁸³ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 355.

⁸⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 183 - 184.

fitiwwa is grounded in stereotypes of working-class men, and these stereotypes informed legal proceedings. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, in the 1920 Alexandria murder case, although *fitiwwa* of varying socioeconomic means appear to have been involved in Raya and Sakina's brothels, only the poorest and least powerful *fitiwwa*, 'Abd al-Rāziq and 'Urābī, were held responsible for the murders based on no evidence other than Raya and Sakina's testimonies. The *fitiwwa* who exercised greater socioeconomic power, such as Muḥammad Khafāga, a business owner, or Muḥammad al-Sammāk and Aḥmad al-Gidr, the leaders of labor gangs, were eventually stricken off the suspect list.

The figure of Muḥammad Khafāga as presented in Raya's testimony indicates that *fitiwwa* was not necessarily synonymous with criminality and violence in the early interwar period, and that the image of the *fitiwwa* as 'thug' may have been a development that began later in the 1930s, as Jacob has also argued. Whereas 'Urābī had a reputation for murder and 'Abd al-Rāziq was known as a notorious criminal, Muḥammad Khafāga was the image of the perfect gentleman, always paying the women he slept with and treating them with respect rather than beating them and stealing their money.⁸⁵ Although Muḥammad Khafāga's middle class status gave him the power to shape his image in this case (a privilege which was not extended to the working-class *fitiwwa*), what is important is what these diverse images tell us about the way in which masculinity was defined in the early interwar period. The *fitiwwa*'s masculinity was predicated on his ability to protect others, which could involve but did not necessitate violence. *Fitiwwa* who had access to other resources often did not have to resort to physical violence to exert their power, and the image of the gentleman and the hero fell under the same category of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 183 - 188.

fitiwwa as the image of the criminal and the murderer. It was only later in the interwar period that the figure of the *fitiwwa* became the exclusive hallmark of a violent, lower-class, criminal masculinity.

The imagined descent of the *fitiwwa* into the *baltagiyya* was likely a product of not only nation-state expansion but also socioeconomic and legal developments in the interwar period. In 1921, a new town-planning scheme in Alexandria focused on the creation of middle class enclaves around the city, prompting the flight of the middle classes into the suburbs.⁸⁶ The association of the *fitiwwa* with working-class communities may have been a product of the mapping of socioeconomic divisions onto the urban landscape. These socioeconomic divisions were subsequently mapped onto the concept of *fitiwwa* masculinity. The 1930s also saw the rise of a more aggressive international campaign led by the League of Nations against men who were involved in the sex trade, leading to the criminalization of men who lived off the proceeds of prostitution in the mid-1930s.⁸⁷ Because of the prominent role that the *fitiwwa* played in the commercial sex industry in Egypt, the criminalization of male involvement in the sex trade likely contributed to the criminalization of the *fitiwwa* in the 1930s. Thus, the infamous *fitiwwa* racketeering case which made headlines in Egypt in 1936 can be read as a product of this global campaign.⁸⁸ It is here that a Foucauldian analysis may be helpful, for the proliferation of state

⁸⁶ See W.H. McLean, *City of Alexandria Town Planning Scheme* (Cairo: Cairo Government Press, 1921). This development will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

⁸⁷ "Souteneurs, 1930 - 1936," Box FL105, Records of the National Vigilance Association, The Women's Library, London School of Economics and Political Science.

⁸⁸ This case has received much scholarly attention from historians of interwar Egypt. See Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, Hammad, "Mechanizing People, Localizing Modernity," and Shaun Lopez, "Media Sensations, Contested Sensibilities: Gender and Moral Order in the Egyptian Mass Media, 1920 - 1955" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2004), 138 - 181. The international criminalization of men who lived off the proceeds of prostitution will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

discourse about the *fitiwwa* in the mid-1930s may represent a shift in the balance of power between state and local actors, which rendered the *fitiwwa* an object of state knowledge.

Although Egyptian nationalist historiography presents the frequency of clashes between the *fitiwwa* and law enforcement as a symbol of the *fitiwwa*'s decline in the interwar period, the increased visibility of the *fitiwwa* during this period might also be read as a symbol of their strength. In fact, a closer look at the legal cases in which the *fitiwwa* appear reveals that they had significant control over their local communities in the early interwar period. The *fitiwwa* in Alexandria exercised varying degrees of socioeconomic and political power, and many of the witnesses in the 1920 murder case were too frightened to speak against them. One woman who was questioned about 'Urābī broke down into tears at the state prosecutor's insistence that she tell him what she knew about the *fitiwwa*. She eventually disclosed the information after the prosecutor told her that the state could not protect the people if they were too scared to speak.⁸⁹ Despite the tendency of historians to emphasize the expansion of state power under the colonial regime, the *fitiwwa*'s strength as local sovereigns appears to have reached an unprecedented height by the early interwar period. One might argue that this was due to the power vacuum created by the political struggle between Egyptian nationalists, the king and the colonial regime, yet this development might also be read as a product of more fundamental gaps and discontinuities created by colonial and nation-state encroachment. The growing battle against prostitution in Egypt which was being waged by both the state and the middle class led to the increasing reliance of sex workers and procurers on local strongmen for protection from harassment. It was the state's failure to protect all the people it claimed to protect which

⁸⁹ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 175.

empowered local sovereigns. In this sense, the growth of both local and state sovereignty in the interwar period may have been mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive.

Although the most obvious threat to the existence of the *fitiwwa* as local sovereigns appeared to be coming from above, the most serious threat was the one that came from below. The rise in subaltern mobility and demographic flux during the war was a challenge to local forms of sovereignty, as the power of the *fitiwwa* to protect their neighborhoods was predicated on their ability to control the movement of people and goods in their areas of jurisdiction. Similar to states, local strongmen expected money or privileges in exchange for protection and permission before crossing borders and/or operating in their area of jurisdiction, and those who did not comply were punished. These local measures were meant to protect not only the power of the local sovereign but also the interests of the people in his neighborhood, as the presence of outsiders could present a threat to the economic stability or safety of the community. This analysis suggests that the reason nation-states criminalized this form of subaltern control over people and goods in the interwar period was that it was essentially rooted in the same type of sovereignty exercised by the nation-state. It was not a traditional form of sovereignty but rather a modern one based on the new challenge of subaltern mobility.

Sex Trafficking

In Judge McBarnet's commentary on the penal code in 1919, he notes that "a recent case disclosed the existence of an elaborate system of trafficking in women extending its tentacles

throughout Egypt.”⁹⁰ McBarnet goes on to describe how the procurers deceived the women by pretending to be servants’ registry agents and then sold them to brothels and individual people around the country, securing the involvement of local sheikhs by paying them a modest sum. He notes a significant and recent increase in the number of minors involved in Egypt’s sex trade, yet insists that the girls were not trapped and chose to stay in the sex trade for the money, as many of them were “deprived of all moral education.”⁹¹

As President of the Cairo Branch’s Executive Committee for the International Association for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic, McBarnet’s observations about sex trafficking in Egypt represent the assumptions of white slavery activists. As Bruce Dunne shows, the racialized discourse of white slavery posited that unlike European women and girls who became trapped in Egypt’s illicit trade and required ‘saving,’ native women and girls were free to leave at any point they wished, and it was only their greed for money and lack of moral upbringing that kept them in the trade. While white women faced external constraints, the only constraints faced by native women were internal. What followed logically from such an assumption was that moral education was the solution to the rise of sex trafficking among native communities in Egypt, a solution which was perfectly compatible with middle-class nationalist assumptions about the role of education in the liberation of the colonized nation, particularly education that emphasized marriage and proper gender and sexual behavior.⁹² Social ills were rooted not in historic conditions but rather in the lack of moral instruction.

⁹⁰ A.C. McBarnet, *The New Penal Code. Offences against Morality and the Marriage Tie and Children* (Le Caire: Imprimerie de L’ Institut Français d’ Archéologie Orientale, 1919), 381, FO 141/466/1, White Slave Traffic (1915 - 1927), The National Archives of the UK Government.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁹² Dunne, “Sexuality and the “Civilizing Process”,” 253 - 313.

The use of the term “white slavery” speaks volumes about the development of bourgeois conceptions of sexuality in the second half of the nineteenth century and about the relationship between race, sexuality, and the concept of the human. White slavery activists usually failed to make a distinction between consent to joining the sex trade and consent to living in a state of indentured sexual servitude because prostitution was envisioned as a form of slavery regardless of the conditions of the trade. Like slaves, prostitutes were frequently referred to as “bodies without souls,” suggesting that it was not the act of trafficking but rather the act of selling sex that enslaved women. Both slaves and sex workers were seen as incomplete humans because of their race/sexuality. In this sense, sexuality is comparable to race in terms of the effect it has on the conceptualization of a person’s humanity. Sexualization and racialization are twin processes of subordination.

Race not only mirrored sexuality in its effect on perceptions of personhood but also intersected with it to produce more complex hierarchies of subordination. White women and girls were presumed virtuous; therefore, if they became involved in prostitution, it was against their will. On the other hand, native girls were seen as engaging in prostitution voluntarily and, therefore, did not usually fit the definition of ‘trafficked women’ as articulated by white slavery activists. This definition of sex trafficking involved the following: 1) initial deception about the intentions of the trafficker 2) the movement of sex workers 3) entrapment in the sex trade against the sex worker’s will. Thus, as Judge McBarnet implied in his report, although there had been a recent rise in native sex trafficking networks, the women and girls they were procuring did not quite fit their definition of trafficking victims. After another infamous sex trafficker, Ibrāhīm al-Gharbī, was put on trial in Egypt in 1923 for trafficking in minors, Chief Inspector

Hughes from the Egyptian state prosecutor's office told activists in Britain that all native prostitutes in Egypt were volunteers, thus implying that they could not be victims of trafficking.⁹³ Since native women and girls were seen as incapable of being entrapped due to their lack of moral convictions, trafficking was a term that - in the minds of colonial officials - could only conceivably be applied to white women. The intersection of race and sexuality thus left native women and teenage girls particularly vulnerable to very problem they were allegedly immune to.

The racialization of the concept of sex trafficking has made it difficult for historians of modern Egypt to study this historical phenomenon due to the absence of sufficient data and literature about native sex trafficking. Sex trafficking cases involving native women and girls appear briefly and infrequently in colonial reports, unlike the large body of literature and data on the trafficking of European women. It is here that the records of the 1920 Alexandria murder case can offer some insight, particularly from the perspective of native girls who had become victims of domestic sex trafficking and were being sold to brothels around the country. Just as scholars have disentangled the concept of 'modernity' from the problematic assumptions of 'modernization theory,' these legal records can help disentangle the concept of 'sex trafficking' from the racialized and classed discourse of 'white slavery.'

Procuring and Sex Trafficking after the War

The end of the war brought about the rise of domestic sex trafficking and a fundamental shift in the clandestine sex trade. The return of native men from the Labor Corps left Alexandria with a

⁹³ Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains," 120.

sizable working-class population yet fewer work opportunities. Many women who had profited from the commercial sex industry during the war continued to ply their trade, and working class men joined them in increasing numbers as procurers and protectors. The relative independence and mobility that many sex workers had enjoyed in Alexandria's wartime economy soon came to an end as competition for clients increased and procurers adopted new strategies to control and profit from the trade. Organized networks formed around the illicit movement of people, narcotics and precious metals, and Alexandria rose to prominence as the center of international and domestic trafficking in Egypt. This development marked a fundamental shift in the clandestine sex industry in interwar Alexandria as procurers sought to develop a monopoly over the sex trade in their neighborhood by increasing their control over the movement and earnings of sex workers operating in their area, making streetwalkers and independent sex workers their biggest challenge.

The return of a large number of unemployed, working-class men from the Egyptian Labor Corps after the war introduced a system of gender exploitation into the procuring business that, as Raya's testimony suggested, had been relatively absent during the second half of the war. Female procurers were no longer in direct control of the money they made from the sex trade as men insisted on taking a significant share of the profits in exchange for the protection they provided against abusive clients and harassment from police and neighbors.⁹⁴ This gendered division of labor led female procurers to join ranks with male procurers in increasing their control over sex workers in their area, thereby establishing a monopoly and maximizing their profits. It was because of and not in spite of this system of gender exploitation that female

⁹⁴ Raya told the state prosecutor that whereas she always had money in her pocket during the war, Hasab Allah confiscated all of her earnings after he returned from the Labor Corps. See 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 468.

procurers joined ranks with male procurers and protectors, for according to Raya and Sakina, they would not have been permitted to run their business otherwise. This decision did not eliminate the gender exploitation that female procurers also experienced in this relationship, as Raya testified that she was subjected to high levels of gender violence and the confiscation of her earnings.

As state surveillance of clandestine sex work increased after the war, Raya and Sakina formed partnerships with people involved in other illicit businesses in their neighborhood in order to expand their client base and protect their business from the police. These subaltern network formations became essential for the survival of the clandestine sex trade, for as indicated in Judge McBarnet's 1919 report about prostitution, the colonial regime had begun to employ harsher measures against the clandestine trade after the war.⁹⁵ It is for this reason that Raya and Sakina's brothels were subjected to frequent police raids throughout 1919 and 1920. Increased state surveillance forced these subaltern networks to rely on the *fitiwwa* in order to prevent neighbors from complaining to the police, as indicated by the testimony of a witness who claimed he had been threatened by the *fitiwwa* when he expressed opposition to Raya's clandestine activities.⁹⁶ In light of the less favorable business conditions after the war, Raya and Sakina formed a partnership with Amīna bint Mansūr in Ḥāret al-Nagāh, agreeing to open a brothel above her hashish cafe so that their sex workers could solicit her customers. Yet according to both Raya and her teenage sex workers, Amīna also played the role of madam, giving clothing and jewelry to the sex workers and then selling the girls to licensed Greek

⁹⁵ McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*.

⁹⁶ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 222.

brothels in Damanhūr and Alexandria when they failed to pay her back.⁹⁷ Two of these girls, Aisha and Samara, were eventually returned to Raya only because the brothels they had been sold to were licensed and they were too young to be registered as prostitutes. Although Raya insinuated during the investigation that she was opposed to the sale of her sex workers, blaming the sale entirely on Amīna, another suspect told the state prosecutor that Raya's brother-in-law was also involved in procuring women for them from Asyūt.⁹⁸ The cotton crisis of 1920 combined with the rapid rise in the cost of living after the war had created a large surplus population in the countryside from which impoverished women were recruited for the sex trade. The evidence presented in the investigation records thus strongly suggests that both the male and female suspects in the case were involved in the trafficking of sex workers to brothels around the country.

The sale of their sex workers to other brothels marked a fundamental shift in Raya and Sakina's business model and the end of the fluidity that had characterized the clandestine sex trade during the war. Whereas many of the independent sex workers that Raya and Sakina had contracted with during the war owned the gold jewelry and clothing they needed to attract clients, the sisters and their business partners began to give these materials to impoverished sex workers after the war, which in turn granted them full control over their movement and labor. Raya told the state prosecutor that she herself had bought seven gold bracelets, a necklace, a pair of earrings, and an anklet for another one of her sex workers, Naẓla bint Abū al-Layl, who was

⁹⁷ Ibid., 180 - 181.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 226.

later murdered after she fell ill with syphilis.⁹⁹ Gold and clothing were essential to the performance of sex work, and sex workers were known for wearing large gold bracelets that could be both seen and heard from afar. Impressive displays of gold jewelry also made the sex worker's body more valuable, and heavily adorned sex workers could charge their clients a higher price.¹⁰⁰ The fact that impoverished sex workers had to rely on others for the materials they needed to do their work reduced them to a state of indentured servitude, enabling traffickers to sell them to other brothels at will. Freedom of mobility in the sex trade was enjoyed only by those who were wealthy enough to buy their own materials, and these women were highly resented by traffickers.

This shift in Raya and Sakina's business model after the war was not unique. The records of the Alexandria serial murder case reveal that a strikingly similar murder case happened in Tanta at the exact same time. The state prosecutor therefore decided to interview the primary suspect in the Tanta case, Mahmoud 'Allām, to determine whether there was a connection between the Tanta murders and the Alexandria murders. The interview revealed that Mahmoud 'Allām had also worked with a trafficking network that procured women from al-Mansūra for the sex trade while simultaneously murdering independent sex workers in Tanta. He told the state prosecutor that his boss seemed to have known about the murders in Alexandria before they were discovered by the police because he had once scolded him and his business partners, telling them, "You guys are failures. The good work is being done in Alexandria."¹⁰¹ Despite the fact

⁹⁹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 341.

¹⁰⁰ See 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 128. 'Adīla charged her clients more money by virtue of the fact that she dressed like a woman of higher social standing.

¹⁰¹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 55. "*Intum khā'ibīn fī 'an al-'amal al-ṣaḥīḥ wil-shughl al-tamām fī Iskandirayya.*"

that Mahmoud ‘Allām's testimony suggested that he was working for a larger trafficking network that controlled operations in both Tanta and Alexandria, the state prosecutor did not investigate the connection any further and Mahmoud ‘Allām was the only suspect executed in the Tanta case.

Regardless of whether the traffickers in Tanta and Alexandria were part of a single network or competing networks, and regardless of whether Raya and Sakina joined this trafficking network voluntarily or by force, the details of the Alexandria murder case show that as both state and social actors attempted to gain control of the sex trade, Raya and Sakina were forced to negotiate with new relations of power in order to maintain their business. As an owner of a clandestine brothel in a hostile neighborhood, Raya was dependent on the *fitiwwa* and her husband to prevent neighbors from harassing her clients and filing complaints with the police. As a result, she had little recourse when these men became violent towards her and her sex workers. Yet at the same time, Raya, Sakina and Amīna all played an active role in exploiting teenage girls for both sex work and domestic work. Even if Raya and Sakina had been opposed to the sale of their sex workers as they claimed, the testimonies of the sex workers indicate that they paid them little and forced them to do household chores and manual labor. ‘Aisha, a divorced teenage girl, was particularly vocal in the investigation about her dissatisfaction with her employment conditions. After the war, she had agreed to work for Raya as a sex worker because she needed to care for her sick mother, and her previous job as a domestic servant had paid her far too little.¹⁰² Yet as Raya’s full-time sex worker, ‘Aisha was frequently instructed to perform manual labor and domestic service that had nothing to do with the original terms of her employment. She was also

¹⁰² ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 159.

sold by Amīna to a brothel in Damanhūr and then to another brothel in Alexandria without her consent, taking her away from the sick mother she was attempting to care for. Despite ‘Aisha’s testimony, Amīna was completely exonerated at trial due to insufficient evidence against her involvement in the murders. The judges and state prosecutor were only interested in criminalizing those who were involved in the murders, and they saw no relationship between the murders and the trafficking in teenage girls. Amīna’s attempt to sell ‘Aisha was thus considered irrelevant to the case, even though it was precisely the changing structure of the clandestine sex trade that gave rise to the serial murders.

This study argues that Amīna’s ability to sell ‘Aisha was predicated on a larger system of increased control over the movement and earnings of sex workers that included not only the teenage girls being sold to other brothels, but also the self-employed sex workers who had frequented Raya and Sakina’s brothels over the past couple of years. As Chapter 3 will show, these sex workers were murdered either because of their resistance to a new system of increased control after the war or because they posed a threat to the operations of the trafficking network. The state prosecutor’s inability to draw a connection between Amīna’s attempt to sell Aisha and the murder of the other sex workers was due not only to the racialization of the concept of sex trafficking, but also to new middle-class discourses about crime and criminality which were rooted in both positivist criminology as well as the political economic interests of middle-class Egyptian nationalists. In the interwar period, criminality was no longer defined solely by actions but rather by character, and deviation from middle-class values - including female domesticity and male productivity - became the basis for drawing the line between the criminal and the law-abiding citizen. As the next chapter will show, these normative conceptions of gender, sexuality

and class shaped the state prosecutor's assumptions about the nature of the crime and the culpability of the suspects.

Chapter 3

In Search of the Unreformable Criminals: Positivism and the Construction of Criminality in Early Interwar Egypt

The three-story house on Makoris Street right behind the al-Labbān police station was in a coveted location. For lower middle-class Europeans who desired the protection of a European-controlled police force,¹ proximity to a police station offered a semblance of safety. For working-class natives engaged in clandestine activities, it offered a degree of invisibility. The police rarely thought to check their backyard for criminal activity, nor were they particularly concerned about crime in native communities during the tumultuous period of Egyptian nationalist activity that followed World War I. After the large-scale nationalist uprisings of March 1919, the police remained focused on putting down political demonstrations, often with a great degree of physical force, all the while paying little attention to the fact that the rate of crimes and misdemeanors in Egypt had gone up by over 23 percent from 1919 to 1920.²

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, given the severity of the economic crisis during and after the war as well as the high rate of unemployment, some people made use of the police's diverted attention by running illicit businesses. For nearly two years after the war, the four rooms

¹ See Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria," 89. Hanley states that although 194 of 223 police recruits were local subjects, these were mainly low-ranking officers. Europeans dominated the high-ranking positions in the Alexandria police force.

² Ministry of Justice, *Statistics for the Native, Shari'a and Mixed Courts, 1919 - 1920*, 1. Violations were excluded from this calculation. Crime statistics had been collected since the beginning of the colonial period. See Mario M. Ruiz, "Criminal Statistics in the Long 1890s," in *The Long 1890s in Egypt: Colonial Quiescence, Subterranean Resistance*, ed. Marilyn Booth and Anthony Gorman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 144. Although cultural historians have argued that these statistics say more about the colonial state's mentality than they do about realities on the ground, the statistics show that crimes such as attempted murder, theft, and sexual assault had all increased by over 20%, while agricultural problems included in criminal statistics such as cotton worm had gone down by over 70%. The statistics from this year thus indicate that there was in fact a significant increase in crime that the colonial state did not effectively address due to its decision to direct its resources towards the suppression of political dissent.

on the bottom floor of the house on Makoris Street were subleased to several different families and individuals who were involved in Alexandria's sex trade, while the second floor was occupied by a Greek shopkeeper and his family who allegedly had little contact with their first-floor neighbors.³ The property manager, an elderly woman by the name of Laṭīfa Muḥammad al-Gamāl, learned about the illicit activity on the first floor from inquisitive neighbors in October 1920, but when the male members of her family complained to an Italian officer in the al-Labbān Police Department, they were ignored.⁴ The al-Gamāl family decided to take the matter to civil court instead, and on October 30, 1920, they won an eviction suit and forced everyone in the building to leave.

Given its prime location, the three-story house on Makoris Street did not remain empty for long. In early November 1920, less than two weeks after the eviction, an Italian man agreed to rent the entire house on the condition that the property manager install a new water and sewage system. The al-Gamāl family promptly obliged, and their nephew, Aḥmad Mursī, was tasked with the initial construction work - an odd choice given his extremely poor vision. During the digging, Aḥmad's shovel struck a hard object and he began to notice a foul smell emanating from the ground. He was unable to see the object, so he bent over, grabbed a hold of it, and tugged. Despite his poor vision, it did not take him long to realize that the object he had just unearthed was a human arm. Curiosity led him to dig a little further until he had unearthed an

³ In his work on Alexandria in the second half of the nineteenth century, Khaled Fahmy mentions that Europeans had little interaction with their Arab neighbors. See Fahmy, "For Cavafy, with Love and Squalor," 277. For further discussion on the question of intercommunal interaction, see Chapter 1.

⁴ As discussed in Chapter 2, the police were most concerned with policing the behavior of white subaltern men and women, or native women who catered to soldiers. Thus, complaints about clandestine native prostitutes were not always heeded.

entire corpse. Shocked and afraid, he quickly covered the remains with dirt and turned to his family members for help.

Perhaps given the lack of support the al-Gamāl family had received from the police in the past, reporting their finding was not an obvious decision. They did not know that the police were currently searching for a missing woman by the name of Fardūs who was last seen with Sakina, a former resident of the house on Makoris Street. They feared that they would be blamed for the crime because they had not rented the house to anyone in the past two weeks. They may have been unaware that a forensic autopsy could identify not only how a victim was murdered, but also when the murder had taken place. A family meeting was called before any further action was taken, and after some deliberation, the al-Gamāl family decided to turn to the al-Labbān police once again. Little did they know that their decision would initiate an investigation into one of the largest serial murder cases in interwar Egypt.

Although the police had previously ignored the al-Gamāl family, this time they listened carefully. On November 15, 1920, Aḥmad appeared more than happy to disclose the secrets he had learned about the house on Makoris Street to the investigating officer. He quickly revealed that prior to the eviction, Sakina had inhabited the room in which the corpse was found. She, in turn, had subleased the room from Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Samnī, who had lived there for two and a half years and had allegedly been running the entire first floor as a clandestine brothel. Aḥmad accused Muḥammad al-Samnī of turning his home into a haven for “thieves and prostitutes,” adding that he had even seen him procure young boys for one of his male tenants.⁵ Muḥammad al-Samnī had mysteriously disappeared shortly after he was evicted from the al-

⁵ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 198 - 199; Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 86.

Gamāl residence at the end of October, and his whereabouts remained unknown throughout the legal proceedings. His wife, however, was immediately detained for questioning, as were Sakina and all of her current and former roommates, friends, and family members. The police then turned the case over to the state prosecutor without delay.

By that time, Sakina had become intimately familiar with the al-Labbān police station. She and her sister Raya had been questioned numerous times over the past year about missing women who were last seen with them, and they had managed to convince the police that they knew nothing of the disappearances. When questioned by the state prosecutor, Sakina persisted in her denial of both the disappearances and the corpse found underneath her room, but Raya quickly broke her silence after learning that the police had also found a number of corpses underneath her room on ‘Alī Bek al-Kebīr Street. During the first few days of Raya’s initial testimonies, the police detained twenty-two people for suspected involvement in the murders and unearthed a total of sixteen corpses from four rooms previously and currently occupied by Sakina, Raya, and their business partner Amīna bint Mansūr. Another corpse which had been found in the street two months earlier was also attributed to this string of murders, bringing the number of murder victims to seventeen.

Although Raya’s testimonies helped the police and state prosecutor piece together some information about the murder case, the persistent denials and conflicting testimonies given by the other suspects ensured that the investigation would continue for over two months, resulting in more than eleven hundred pages of investigative notes. In the end, the culpability of the suspects remained contested. A prominent Egyptian journalist by the name of Salāḥ ‘Īsa has published an engaging and detailed account of the case in Arabic based on these legal records, yet his

approach to the records is journalistic rather than historical.⁶ His book, *Raya and Sakina's Men: A Sociopolitical Study*, challenges popular myths about the murders by skillfully humanizing both the suspects and the perpetrators in a way that no writer or producer had ever done before. Yet the purpose of his book is to narrate the murders and legal proceedings rather than to analyze them, and thus he attempts to construct a coherent narrative of the case based on the conclusions reached by the Egyptian judiciary. From a historian's perspective, this search for coherence is not only futile but also potentially destructive, for the historical richness of the case lies precisely in its disjunctures and contradictions. The ambiguities and gaps in the state prosecutor's understanding of the case highlight the way in which race, class, gender and sexuality shaped criminal proceedings. It is thus the unsolved nature of the case - or, rather, its current unsolvability - which makes these legal records valuable material for a study of the historical assumptions and technologies of rule that guided criminal litigation in colonial and semicolonial Egypt. This chapter will historicize the assumptions made by the state prosecutor and examine the way in which they shaped the outcome of this criminal investigation.

Criminality and Discursive Power in the Making of a Modern Rule of Law

Through an analysis of the investigation records of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case located through both the National Judicial Studies Center in Cairo and the modern history digitization project of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, this chapter contributes to a sparse body of literature on crime and criminality in interwar Egypt. Insight into criminal litigation against native subjects since the colonial period remains rare due to scholars' limited access to twentieth-

⁶ 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*.

century Egyptian criminal court records. While records of criminal cases prior to the creation of the Native Courts in 1883 are available in the Egyptian National Archives, criminal court records from the post-1883 period are housed in Dār al-Maḥfūzāt, which researchers have had difficulty accessing over the past few decades. This means that scholars interested in criminal justice in twentieth-century Egypt have had to probe existing studies and judicial libraries to find potentially relevant material. For this reason, while scholars of modern Egypt have conducted a number of seminal studies based on the records of nineteenth-century criminal cases,⁷ few such studies exist for the colonial and semicolonial periods.⁸ Similarly, due to the fact that criminal proceedings against Europeans living in Egypt were handled by their respective consulates and are readily accessible in European archives, scholars of modern Egypt have made excellent use of European consular court records to study crime in Euro-Egyptian communities during the colonial period.⁹ Yet crime and criminal adjudication in native communities since the late nineteenth century remains significantly understudied due to the limited material available to historians.

⁷ For studies based on the records of nineteenth-century criminal cases, see Khaled Fahmy, "The Police and the People in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," in "State, Law and Society in Nineteenth Century Egypt," special issue, *Die Welt des Islams* 39:3 (November 1999): 340 - 377; Khaled Fahmy, "Law, Medicine and Society in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Egypte/Monde arabe* 34 (1998): 17-51; Khaled Fahmy, "Justice, Law and Pain in Khedival Egypt," in *Standing Trial: Law and the Person in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Baudouin Dupret (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 85-116; Fahmy, "The Anatomy of Justice"; Rudolph Peters, "Islamic and Secular Criminal Law in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: The Role and Function of the Qadi," *Islamic Law and Society* 4:1 (1997): 70 - 90; and Kozma, *Policing Egyptian Women*.

⁸ For a study of crime during the colonial period, see Chapter 5 of Samera Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), which utilizes microfilm copies of court records from the colonial period found in the Ministry of Justice's Council for Judicial Studies in Cairo, Egypt. For a study of rural crime in Egypt in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Nady 'Abd al-Ghaffar, "Al-Jarīma fī al-Rīf al-Miṣrī, 1882 - 1952" ["Crime in the Egyptian Countryside, 1882 - 1952"] (MA thesis, Zagazig University, 2003).

⁹ See Mario M. Ruiz, "Intimate Disputes, Illicit Violence: Gender, Law and the State in Colonial Egypt" (PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2004); Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria"; and Lanver Mak, *The British in Egypt: Community, Crime and Crises, 1882 - 1922* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

The difficulty of accessing twentieth-century criminal proceedings against native subjects has limited our understanding of the historical development of the Egyptian criminal justice system, particularly with regards to the way in which it has been shaped by positivist criminology. This chapter builds on a small body of literature on the positivization of Egyptian law in the twentieth century by using the investigation records of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case to examine the way in which positivism shaped not only the state's formulation and application of criminal law, but also its perceptions of crime and criminality. According to Talal Asad, positivization was marked by certain underlying assumptions, most notably that codification results in a consistent and equal application of the law, and that legal validity is determined by social norms rather than morality.¹⁰ In *Juridical Humanity: A Colonial History*, Samera Esmeir builds on Asad's work by highlighting the way in which the colonial regime's introduction of positive law claimed to humanize Egyptians by subjecting them to a modern rule of law that allegedly placed limits on the arbitrary decisions of sovereign power.¹¹ According to Esmeir, the humane reforms adopted by the colonial state were based on Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian theory of law, which put forth the notion that the purpose of punishment was to make pain productive.¹² She notes that Egyptian legislators often cited Bentham, and his work was largely influential in reforms of the Egyptian criminal justice system. Yet the writings of positivist criminologists in the late nineteenth century reveal that Bentham's ideas also contributed to the formation of an additional theory that radically transformed the Egyptian

¹⁰ Talal Asad, "Thinking About Law, Morality and Religion in the Story of Egyptian Modernization," Special Issue, *JISMOR* 1 (2005): 13 - 24.

¹¹ Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity*, 1 - 20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 120.

criminal justice system in the early interwar period, which was that in order to make pain productive, punishments should fit not only the crime, but also the criminal. As William Douglas Morrison wrote in his introduction to Cesare Lombroso's *The Female Offender*, the reform of the penal code should "act upon the principle so clearly enunciated by Bentham of adjusting our methods of penal treatment to the nature of the offender as well as to the nature of the offence."¹³ Positivist criminologists thus used Bentham's work to argue that equality in punishment was unproductive and would not ensure justice, making the concept of a criminal character central to modern theories of crime and punishment.

The discourse of criminality that emerged from the discipline of positivist criminology in the late nineteenth century was based on the belief that criminal behavior could be understood through scientific observation.¹⁴ Crime was no longer seen as an act of free will and rational calculation which anyone could engage in, but rather a product of involuntary behavior that could be theorized and quantified using scientific measures. The scientific study of crime produced what Foucault identifies as the delinquent, one whose deviance stemmed from abnormal biological traits, psychological illness, or socialization.¹⁵ The law was informed by social scientific understandings of normative human behavior, and thus deviance, whether

¹³ Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), xviii.

¹⁴ *Commentary on Egyptian Criminal Law*, 17. This book was purchased from Cairo's used book market, Sūq al-Azbakiyya, with no title page. From the introduction, it is clear that the book was written either towards the end of WWI or shortly thereafter.

¹⁵ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977); For early criminological works on biological abnormalities, see Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); For psychoanalytic studies of criminality, see August Aichhorn, *Wayward Youth: A Psychoanalytic Study of Delinquent Children* (London: Imago Publishing Co, 1951); For sociological theories of criminality, see Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: The Free Press, 1982).

produced by internal or external forces, became synonymous with criminality. All aspects of the life of a criminal suspect became central to legal proceedings.

The investigation records of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case reveal that by the early interwar period, positivist theories of criminality were inscribed onto the body of the habitual offender, known in Arabic as the *ashqīyā'*,¹⁶ producing a distinction between reformable and unreformable criminals. The notion of unreformability was based on new social scientific understandings of deviance and its relationship to lack of productivity.¹⁷ This split becomes most evident when comparing the 1904 and 1919 commentaries on the Egyptian penal code. The 1904 commentary defines the habitual offender as one who repeats a crime after he has been punished for it.¹⁸ The danger he posed to society was thus defined by his actions. In contrast, the commentary on the 1919 penal code makes a clear distinction between reformable and unreformable criminals, clarifying that the distinction lies not in their repeat offenses, but rather in their character. The commentary states that there are "...two totally different types of criminal. The first type is the youth or young man, sound in mind and body, who has got into evil ways through idleness or bad companions. It may quite well be hoped that the regime of the Barrage Prison may succeed in reforming such a person ... On the other hand, there are a large number of elderly men, feeble in mind or body, or given to hashish, who commit repeated petty theft ...

¹⁶ While the term *ashqīyā'* was used mainly in reference to rural bandits, banditry dominated colonial discourse about crime in Egypt, largely due to colonial economic interests in the Egyptian countryside. For further discussion of the *ashqīyā'*, see Nathan J. Brown, "Brigands and State Building: The Invention of Banditry in Modern Egypt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32:2 (April 1990): 258 - 281; See also Chapter 6 of Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity*.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the politicization of productivity in the modern era, see Melis Hafez, "The Lazy, the Idle, the Industrious: Discourse and Practice of Work and Productivity in Late Ottoman Society," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2012).

¹⁸ Egypte. Ministère de la Justice, *Note Explicative Sur Le Code Pénal et Le Code d'Instruction Criminelle* (Le Caire: Imprimerie Nationale, 1904), 60.

These persons are really incapable of reform."¹⁹ The 1919 commentary reveals that by the early interwar period, the dividing line between the reformable and unreformable criminal was based on age, intelligence and addiction. The hardened criminal who needed to be permanently removed from society was identified by his deviant character and his lack of productivity rather than his deeds.

In the investigation of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case, the lives of the suspects thus became central to the state prosecutor's determination of their culpability. In his interrogation of male suspects, the state prosecutor focused on their potential for productivity, which he based on their employment history, their current sources of income, the logic and intelligibility of their responses to his questions, and the frequency with which they engaged in illicit activities. Special emphasis was placed on whether they had permanent jobs or worked as temporary laborers, and whether they frequented hashish cafes. Female suspects were evaluated on the basis of their vulnerability, which was largely conditioned on their adherence to gender and sexual norms that were both racialized and classed. These norms included domesticity, political and economic dependence on men, and modesty when questioned about sexual matters. The positivization of Egyptian law and its emphasis on social norms shaped the state prosecutor's perception of who was likely to commit a crime. Deviance was theorized at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race and class, and it became the basis for drawing the line between innocence and guilt, humanity and inhumanity, and the right to life and death.

In addition to its role in assessing the culpability of the suspects, deviance became the deciding factor in determining the criminal responsibility of the accomplices to the murders.

¹⁹ Egypt, *Draft Penal Code*, 5.

Although the development of a modern rule of law in Egypt purportedly decreased the arbitrariness of governance by decreasing the discretionary powers of government officials, the vagueness of the Egyptian penal code with regards to the treatment of accomplices in criminal cases highlights the fallacy of law's uniformity and predictability. The commentary on the 1904 penal code discusses the question of penalties against accomplices extensively, noting that the code grants judges significant powers of interpretation regarding the fate of those who are passively involved in the commission of a crime. The 1904 commentary attempted to provide some guidelines in assessing the criminal responsibility of accomplices, and these guidelines were reaffirmed without further discussion in the 1919 commentary, yet the guidelines did not impose limits on the discretionary powers of judges in this matter.²⁰ Accomplices could be treated in the exact same manner as perpetrators, particularly if the judges believed that the crime could not have been executed without their assistance.²¹ The fates of Raya, Sakina, and Amīna, and the determination of their responsibility for the corpses found in their homes, was thus left entirely up to the discretion of the legal officials of the state, who took all aspects of their lives into consideration. For this reason, the depositions present a rich narrative of not only the murders, but also the personal history and self-perceptions of the female suspects as mediated by the state prosecutor. These detailed narratives reveal that while the rule of law allegedly placed constraints on the arbitrary power of legal officials, it expanded their discursive power over the population by granting them the authority to construct knowledge about individual subjects. The

²⁰ See *Note Explicative* (1904), 21 - 32 and 41 - 53; See also *Draft Penal Code* (1920), 9.

²¹ *Note Explicative* (1904), 43.

development of a modern conception of the rule of law in Egypt was thus based on a change in the nature of sovereign power rather than an attempt to limit it.

Although most Foucauldian studies of the criminal justice system focus on mechanisms of disciplinary power, this chapter relies on Foucault's notion of discursive power to highlight the way in which crime and criminality were constructed in modern Egypt. The shift in the nature of power which began during the colonial period sheds further light on what Esmeir notes as the success of colonial law in binding the human to the state. That success rested on the ability of the law to harness both new and existing power structures of gender, sexuality, class and race in its discursive construction of the normative human versus the deviant. This chapter attempts to theorize the way in which these power structures shaped the development of the rule of law in early interwar Egypt, and the way in which this in turn granted sociolegal legitimacy to middle-class rule. It builds on existing studies of the relationship between the rule of law and the expansion of state power in the modern era by exploring the way in which Egyptian law mediated discursively between state power and social relationships of power, in turn institutionalizing the hegemony of both. The house on Makoris Street and its position behind the al-Labbān police station thus symbolized the symbiosis of state and social power in the development of a modern rule of law in interwar Egypt.

Policing in Early Interwar Alexandria

As a symbol of colonial state power, the al-Labbān police station became the focal point of the controversy surrounding the discovery of the seventeen corpses in Raya, Sakina and Amīna's homes. Immediately after the discovery of the first corpse, the al-Labbān police pulled all the

cases of missing women in Alexandria that had been opened in the past year. The investigation records show that between 1919 and 1920, numerous police reports had been filed about missing wives and mothers in Alexandria, and many of the reports state that the missing women were last seen with Raya or Sakina.²² In one case, a witness told the police that she had recently seen Sakina wearing an article of clothing that had belonged to the missing woman.²³ The records show that the police questioned Raya and Sakina about each of the disappearances in which they were implicated, but each time, the sisters insisted that they had no knowledge of the women's whereabouts. Most of the reports about the disappearances were therefore promptly dismissed after a preliminary investigation that involved little more than brief interviews with a few suspects and witnesses.

The fact that Raya and Sakina had been implicated in the unsolved cases of missing women in Alexandria for an entire year raises several questions about the nature of policing under colonial rule in Alexandria. Why did the police fail to follow up on valuable leads? Why did they not obtain warrants to search Raya and Sakina's homes for the missing women who were last seen with them? The police officer who eventually discovered the corpses buried in Raya's home on 'Alī Bek al-Kebīr Street stated in his report that the stench of rotten flesh was so strong he could smell it before he even stepped foot in the house.²⁴ If this was true, then certainly a police officer's visit to Raya's home at some point during the past year would have raised suspicions. Although bribery and corruption may have played a role in the failures of the police,

²² Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 26 - 115.

²³ 'Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 425.

²⁴ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 69.

the state prosecutor did not find evidence of this during his two-month investigation.²⁵ Media reports about the case also focused on questioning the effectiveness of the police rather than raising suspicions of corruption.²⁶ How could policing in early interwar Alexandria have been so blatantly ineffective?

The inadequacies of the police in this case bring to light the way in which sexuality, gender, race and class shaped the nature of policing under colonial rule. The failure of the police to fully investigate the reports of the missing women was likely due to popular assumptions about the gendered and sexual behavior of 'respectable' women. Given the reputation that Raya and Sakina had acquired for their involvement in Alexandria's clandestine sex industry, it was commonly assumed that women who associated with them were engaging in illicit sexual activity, and that those who laid claim to respectability were hiding their activities from their families. The sisters took advantage of these assumptions to deflect the police's suspicions away from them, and their interviews with the police thus suggested that the missing women had either run away with a lover or had joined the clandestine sex industry. For example, when asked about the disappearance of a married woman by the name of Zannūba bint Muḥammad Mūsa, Sakina responded by saying that the woman was promiscuous (*māshya 'ala kayfha*) and Raya suggested that the police ask her lover, Muḥammad al-Sammāk.²⁷ Although Zannūba's brothers continued to pressure the police to look for her, the police stopped investigating after they spoke with Raya and Sakina and never questioned her alleged lover, Muḥammad al-Sammāk. 'Respectable'

²⁵ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 878.

²⁶ Yunan Labib Rizk, "The Women Killers," *al-Ahrām Weekly*, June 1999, Issue No. 434, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/434/chrncls.htm>

²⁷ Malaf Qadayyat *Raya wi Sakina*, 131. More precisely, the phrase *māshya 'ala kayfha* refers to women whose sexuality was uncontrolled by men and whose behavior violated social norms.

women who deviated from gender and sexual norms thus lost the protection of the state, and the silence about these cases left women in al-Labbān increasingly vulnerable to violence.

The negligence of the police in this case was also due in part to the racial dynamics of policing in colonial Egypt. Natives in al-Labbān who complained to the police about secret brothels in their neighborhood were dismissed as having a tendency to exaggerate, as in the case of the al-Gamāl family, while Europeans who complained often succeeded in mobilizing the police to take action. Native residents in Alexandria who lodged complaints were thus more likely to have their voices heard if they filed it jointly with their European neighbors, as in the case of a petition filed by native and European residents of the al-‘Aṭṭārīn district in August 1921, which sparked a number of subsequent police raids on clandestine brothels in that area.²⁸ The colonial state was also more concerned about policing the behavior of white subalterns than native subalterns,²⁹ so the colonial archives are filled with complaints about European prostitutes and soldier, yet few complaints about native sex workers. Although Europeans were more likely to seek and receive protection from the police, they were also more likely to have their behavior policed. Protection went hand in hand with control.

The failure of the police to both protect and control the native population in Alexandria reached an unprecedented height during the early interwar period. The war and its end had brought increased suffering to a dislocated peasantry, day laborers and shopkeepers, at the same time empowering an expanding middle class. The large-scale popular uprising in March 1919 marked the beginning of years of demonstrations and violent skirmishes with the colonial police

²⁸ "Petition dated August 12, 1921 addressed to Lord Allenby and signed by European and Arab residents of the al-‘Aṭṭārīn district in Alexandria," FO 141/466/3, The National Archives of the UK Government.

²⁹ See Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class and 'White Subalternity' in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2009).

force and military, and state authorities were increasingly seen as an enemy of the people rather than a source of protection. This challenge to the power of the state was accompanied by a change in the power of the *fitwāna*, a social force that had long co-existed with state power. As discussed in Chapter 2, these neighborhood strongmen exercised a high degree of control over workers in the early interwar period, and although there was always the potential for abuse, these relationships became increasingly violent after the war. While the racial dynamics of colonial state policing may have contributed to the empowerment of the *fitwāna* during this period, it is more useful to view state power and social power as concurrent mechanisms of control over the population rather than mutually exclusive forces. As state power increased during the colonial period, so did the power of the *fitiwwa*. And as police violence escalated in response to popular demands after the war, so did the *fitiwwa*'s abuse of the working class. Abuses of state power enabled and exacerbated abuses of social power.

The investigation records reveal that the degree of coercive power exercised by the *fitiwwa* over the working class in al-Labbān in the early interwar period thwarted the police's ability to investigate the reports of the missing women. After the disappearance of Nazla bint Abū al-Layl in January 1920, a sex worker named Shafīqa told Nazla's mother that 'Urābī Ḥassān had shown her a letter he had received from another *fitiwwa* by the name of 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sharbaṭlī stating that he had taken Nazla to Upper Egypt. When Nazla's mother asked Shafīqa to testify before the police, she refused on the grounds that she was terrified of these two *fitiwwa* because they were murderers.³⁰ When the state prosecutor questioned 'Abd al-Raḥīm's wife during his investigation later that year, she also did not want to answer his questions on the

³⁰ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 48.

grounds that the *fitiwwa* could kill her.³¹ Similarly, in the case of a missing woman named Zannūba bint Muḥammad Mūsa in May 1920, two witnesses had told Zannūba's brother that shortly before her disappearance, they had seen her being beaten by Muḥammad al-Sammāk, the *fitiwwa* with whom she had been secretly involved. However, Zannūba's brother could not get the witnesses to testify before the police because they were afraid of al-Sammāk's power to harm them. The fear of being murdered or assaulted for testifying as a witness against a *fitiwwa* made the investigation of crime in Alexandria particularly challenging.³²

The police themselves often did not want to intervene in cases that involved powerful *fitiwwa*. In the case of Zannūba bint Muḥammad Mūsa, Raya pointed the police in the direction of Muḥammad al-Sammāk, yet the police never called him in for questioning.³³ They also did not detain or question him after the discovery of the corpses. The police's avoidance of cases that involved powerful *fitiwwa* extended to the Alexandria state prosecutor who, within one week of the discovery of the corpses, decided not to show up for work the next day. When questioned about his absence, he stated that he was exhausted and could not continue the investigation.³⁴ He was immediately replaced by a state prosecutor from Cairo. The refusal of the Alexandria state prosecutor to investigate the murders suggests that the power of the suspects was more coercive than the power of the state. The degree of control that the *fitiwwa* in Alexandria exercised over their neighborhoods thus extended to state officials as well as the local population.

³¹ Ibid., 175; ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 294.

³² The colonial state had long been concerned about the population's refusal to testify in murder cases, especially in the countryside. See Mario Ruiz, "Criminal Statistics in the Long 1890s," 144; See also Esmeir, *Juridical Humanity*, 280.

³³ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 131.

³⁴ ʿAbd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 116.

The behavior of al-Labbān's working-class population in cases that involved the *fitiwwa* brings into question the role of policing in the establishment of state hegemony during the colonial period. The limitations of policing at this time were attributable not only to the failures of the state's coercive power, but also to its failure to exercise consensual power in working class spaces. Most of the people who turned to the police were the relatives of wealthier victims who had some claim to respectability. But the number of families that filed police reports account for only half the corpses. People like the al-Gamāl family and Raya's neighbors continued to turn to local authorities such as the shaykh al-ḥāra for assistance with disputes, and these local authorities did not always advise them to turn to the police. In one instance, a neighbor of Raya's who had been harassing her clients outside her home was threatened by the *fitiwwa* to stop his harassment. The neighbor turned to the shaykh al-ḥāra for help, and the shaykh advised him not to take any further action.³⁵ The failure of the police to secure the consent and cooperation of subalterns in al-Labbān was reaffirmed by the behavior of other local authorities, who did not see the police as a viable alternative to the power of the *fitiwwa*.

As will be shown later in this chapter, the investigation into these murders reveals that the state began to establish hegemony over subalterns in al-Labbān through cooperation with the most powerful *fitiwwa* rather than competition. While Jacob examines the subjugation of the *fitiwwa* through their criminalization in the 1930s,³⁶ the investigation records of this case show that the state did not criminalize the *fitiwwa* as a group in the early interwar period. Those *fitiwwa* who cooperated with the state were labeled heroes and incorporated into the ruling class,

³⁵ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 222 - 224.

³⁶ See Jacob, *Working out Egypt*, Chapter 6.

while those who challenged the power of the state were labeled thugs and criminalized. While both incorporation and criminalization were twin processes of subjugation, the treatment of the *fitiwwa* in this case reveals that state hegemony was built on the hegemony of the *fitiwwa* rather than in opposition to it.

Historicizing the Problem of Evidence

The discovery of the seventeen corpses generated a high degree of alarm in the media over the failures of policing in Alexandria and brought into question the legitimacy of the state. For this reason, the state prosecutor's office took extreme measures to prosecute alleged perpetrators and assure the population of the state's protective powers. Gaps and inconsistencies about the roles of the suspects and the motives for the murders were willfully ignored and covered up for the purpose of creating a captivating story about the spread of banditry to urban centers and the heroism of the state. Suspects were held accountable for the murders on the basis of other suspects' testimonies, and confessions were extracted under oppressive conditions.³⁷ After two months, the state prosecutor felt that he had gathered enough evidence to prove what he had sought to prove from the beginning of the investigation - that the murders were committed by a group of bandits whose motive was to rob the victims of their jewelry, and that only the poorest and most feeble-minded suspects could have been desperate and foolish enough to participate in

³⁷ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 1533 - 1603. Ḥasab Allah and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl stated in court that the state prosecutor had extracted their confessions under conditions of hunger and verbal abuse. Contemporary media accounts of the investigation also reported that when Sakina began narrating her confession before the state prosecutor, she spoke while eagerly devouring a large meal, suggesting that the granting or withholding of food may have been used for the purpose of extracting confessions. See "Silsilat al-Jarā'im fī Buyūt al-Hilāk [The Series of Crimes in the Houses of Destruction]," *Wādī al-Nīl*, December 9, 1920, 3.

such a heinous crime.³⁸ As Chapter 4 will show, this assumption was based not only on colonial logic but also on growing middle class concerns over the insecurity of private property, particularly in response to the socioeconomic instability and dislocation caused by World War I.

While the purpose of this chapter is not to solve a historic murder case, reviewing the evidence presented during the investigation is necessary in order to shed light on both historical changes in Alexandria's sex trade as well as the historical assumptions that guided the state prosecutor's interpretation of the evidence. The evidence presented in the records includes a forensic analysis of the corpses, the testimonies of witnesses and suspects, and the analysis of items found in the suspects' homes. Although this evidence was inconclusive, the state prosecutor made firm conclusions about the nature of the crime based on the information he gathered. This section historicizes both the evidence and the conclusions, highlighting the way in which these serial murders reflected historical developments in colonial Egypt. It thus builds on the arguments presented in Chapter 2 by analyzing the way in which the murders intersected with the growth of native trafficking networks after the war. The discussion of the state prosecutor's interpretation of the evidence also provides a foundation for the analysis of media reports about the case in Chapter 4.

The evidence that carried the most weight in the investigation was the forensic autopsy of the corpses. Fahmy shows that forensic medicine was used regularly in criminal investigations in nineteenth-century Egypt under shari'a law, and that medical examiners could determine how a

³⁸ In her discussion of criminality in the 1930s and 40s, Omnia El Shakry notes that Egyptian discourse about rural crime emphasized cruelty while discourse about urban crime emphasized materiality. See Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 120. In this case, the discourse of the state prosecutor and the media emphasized both the cruelty and the materialism of the suspects, most likely because the suspects were rural migrants living in an urban environment. This discussion will be taken up further in Chapter 4.

victim was killed in addition to the age of a wound or scar.³⁹ Forensic science would thus most aptly be described as a global technology in continuous development marked by several groundbreaking advancements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁰ In this serial murder case, the corpses were examined by Sydney Smith, who became the medico-legal advisor to the Egyptian government during WWI. As a New Zealander who studied forensic science in Scotland and later worked in Ceylon, Smith's career symbolized the global circulation of forensic knowledge in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴¹ After examining the majority of the corpses, Smith found that all of the victims were women between the ages of twenty and fifty who died of asphyxiation. He found no evidence of flesh wounds, broken bones or other bodily harm, nor did he find evidence of poisoning. He therefore concluded that the victims had been placated with alcohol and then suffocated prior to their burial. He justified his conclusion on the basis that alcohol was the most easily accessible substance to the perpetrators, and his analysis was accepted as the dominant narrative about the murders.⁴² Since some of the victims were tall and large, the state prosecutor thus assumed that the perpetrators had to be strong, muscular men who were capable of overpowering the victims. This led him to focus his attention on the male suspects who had served in the British Army's Labor Corps during the war. The forensic analysis of the cause of death thus served as the basis for determining the culpability of the suspects.

³⁹ See Fahmy, "The Anatomy of Justice"; See also Fahmy, "Women, Medicine and Power."

⁴⁰ See Robert Wennig, "Forensic Toxicology," in *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*, accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c09/E6-12-23-00.pdf>; See also Sydney Smith, "History and Development of Forensic Medicine," *British Medical Journal* 1:4707 (1951): 599–607.

⁴¹ Sydney Smith, *Mostly Murder: Sir Sydney Smith's Autobiography* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010).

⁴² 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 114.

Smith's narrative about the cause of death contradicted many of the testimonies of the witnesses and suspects as well as historical developments in early interwar Egypt. When questioned by the state prosecutor, Raya's daughter claimed that she had seen her father, Ḥasab Allah, put a white substance in the alcoholic drink that he gave to the victims. This white substance was sometimes in the form of a powder and at other times in the form of a liquid.⁴³ She revealed that when the victims drank the cup of alcohol mixed with this white substance, they would experience extreme gastrointestinal upset and lose consciousness. Although Ḥasab Allah at first denied his daughter's allegation, he later admitted to it. The police also found a capsule filled with white powder in the home of a suspect by the name of Aḥmad al-Gidr, a *ftiwwa* whom Raya had initially implicated in the murders.⁴⁴ This white substance was likely cocaine or heroin, as colonial records indicate that cocaine had become so easily accessible in the early interwar period that British soldiers were using it in the bars of Cairo's Wagh al-Birka red light district.⁴⁵ The reopening of trade routes after the war led to many changes on the ground that colonial state authorities appeared to be unaware of in the early interwar period, including the accessibility of drugs. Although the Egyptian state did not initiate a campaign against drug use until the late 1920s,⁴⁶ state records indicate that drugs had become increasingly widespread in the early interwar period.

⁴³ Ibid., 177.

⁴⁴ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 532. The state prosecutor questioned only Aḥmad al-Gidr's daughter and wife about the substance, and the investigation records in my possession do not state the results of any lab analysis performed on this white substance.

⁴⁵ "Letter dated January 23, 1923 from Dr. Carlo Vignaty to Lord Allenby, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in Egypt," 2, FO 141/466/3, The National Archives of the UK Government.

⁴⁶ Liat Kozma, "White Drugs in Interwar Egypt: Decadent Pleasures, Emaciated Fellahin and the Campaign against Drugs," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33:1 (2013): 89 - 101.

The contradiction between the forensic analysis of the corpses and the evidence gathered from the suspects and witnesses did not figure prominently in the state prosecutor's narrative of the murders. When presented with contradictory evidence, the state prosecutor chose to rely on scientific reasoning, even though the most significant advancements in forensic toxicology were not made until the mid-1920s.⁴⁷ The last victims' body was found more than ten days after her murder, and it is likely that Smith was unable to determine whether drugs were involved in the cause of death. Yet despite the limitations of forensic toxicology in this case, the knowledge of scientific experts was nonetheless considered more reliable than the knowledge of eyewitnesses.

The potential involvement of drugs challenges not only the way in which the murders were executed, but also the nature of the crime. Throughout the investigation, the state prosecutor assumed that the motive of the perpetrators and accomplices was to rob the women of their gold. Yet one of the witnesses, Sayyida bint Sulaymān, claimed that she had seen Ḥasab Allah having sex with one of the victims on the night of her murder. She lived in the same house as Sakina and alleged that she had seen the victim lying motionless on Sakina's mattress with Ḥasab Allah on top of her. The victim was facing the window and her eyes were open. At dawn, Sayyida heard a woman's scream coming from Sakina's room, but Sakina told her that she had not heard anything.⁴⁸ Sayyida also claimed that she confronted Ḥasab Allah after the event and was given money to remain silent about what she had seen. Sayyida's testimony suggests that the victims were drugged and then raped, and that they were not killed right away. In fact, it is unclear whether the cause of death was drug and alcohol overdose or suffocation. The only

⁴⁷ Wennig, "Forensic Toxicology," 5.

⁴⁸ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 85.

suspects who confessed to their involvement in the case were Raya and Sakina, and neither of them was present during the murders.

Despite the fact that the forensic autopsies concluded that all of the victims had died in the same manner, the role of rape in the murders was never assessed. The forensic report provided by Smith does not mention the performance of any gynecological examinations on the corpses despite Sayyida's testimony. As a number of studies about modern Egypt have shown, female doctors called *ḥākimas* played an important role in forensic medicine and rape cases in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ Yet some of these studies argue that during the colonial period, British officials significantly reduced the role of the *ḥākimas* and increasingly masculinized the Egyptian medical profession.⁵⁰ The marginalization of the *ḥākimas* and the concurrent masculinization of Egyptian medicine raises the question of the significance of rape in criminal investigations. Did the Egyptian state fail to consider the role of rape in these murders because the victims were engaged in sex work and therefore perceived to be unrapable,⁵¹ or was rape increasingly overlooked in criminal investigations during this period? Although these questions require further research which is beyond the scope of this study, the fact that sexual violence was not considered in the investigation of these serial murders shaped the state prosecutor's perception of the culpability of the suspects. Considering that the murders may have been the

⁴⁹ See Fahmy, "Women, Medicine and Power,"; Nancy Gallagher, "Writing Women Medical Practitioners into the History of Modern Egypt," *Re-envisioning Egypt, 1919 - 1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt et al (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005), 351 - 370; Kozma, "Negotiating Virginity," 55 - 65; Laverne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Hibba Abugideiri, *Gender and the Making of Modern Medicine in Colonial Egypt* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010).

⁵⁰ Hibba Abugideiri, *Gender and the Making of Modern Medicine*, 116.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the normalization of violence against sex workers, see Sherene Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice," in *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, ed. Sherene Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 121 - 156.

work of a serial rapist would have led him to focus his attention on a single perpetrator rather than several. Yet the state prosecutor was so convinced that the murders were perpetrated by a gang of robbers that he prevented Ḥasab Allah's attorney from obtaining a psychiatric evaluation to determine whether his client was clinically insane.⁵²

Guided by the assumption that the murders were motivated by robbery, the state prosecutor dedicated a great deal of time and attention to the belongings of the suspects. Each suspect who appeared to have more wealth than his job could account for was aggressively questioned, as were suspects who were in possession of items that looked familiar to the victims' families. When the state prosecutor showed Fardūs' mother belongings confiscated from Sakina's home, she identified a gold watch which she believed had belonged to her daughter. No less than fifty pages of the investigation records were dedicated to tracing the movement of Sakina's gold watch through time and space.⁵³ Sakina claimed that she had pawned the watch at a store owned by a Greek man in Alexandria, and despite the fact that the pawn shop owner had records proving that Sakina had pawned the same watch on and off over a course of two years, the state prosecutor persisted in his attempt find a connection between Sakina and Fardūs' lost watch. Although his persistence failed in this instance, he eventually succeeded in tracing one of Fardūs' sweaters to Sakina's husband, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl.⁵⁴ Given the reticence to speak on the part of most witnesses and suspects, and given the fact that fingerprinting had not yet become widespread, the movement of material objects was highly valued as a potential source of evidence in criminal proceedings at this time.

⁵² ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 880.

⁵³ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 481 - 531.

⁵⁴ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 716.

The colonial state's increased concern with the circulation of gold both during and after the war also shaped the state prosecutor's assumptions about the crime and his evaluation of the evidence. As discussed in Chapter 1, the colonial state had fixed the price of gold and banned its export during the war in an attempt to ensure that it would have access to sufficient supplies of gold to pay its debts after the war. Colonial powers were particularly concerned with augmenting their official gold reserves after the war, and this was regularly discussed in newspapers such as *The Egyptian Gazette*. On January 6, 1919, *The Egyptian Gazette* reported that the Treasury Committee on the Production of Gold within the Empire had issued a report discussing the importance of maintaining Britain's gold reserve to meet foreign indebtedness, which required that Britain's exports exceed the value of its imports.⁵⁵ This concern with the movement of gold is apparent in what the state prosecutor considered to be relevant evidence during the investigation. He thus spent the majority of the investigation tracing the movement of gold to and from the suspects in the murder case, only to find that the majority of them had been buying gold rather than selling it. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the official records of local gold transactions acquired by the state prosecutor indicate that between January 1918 and November 1920, Sakina and her third husband, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, sold gold jewelry only 3 times while purchasing it at least 28 times: 5 times in 1918, 5 times in 1919, and 18 times in 1920.⁵⁶ Although these records contradicted the state prosecutor's theory that the perpetrators had killed the women in order to steal their gold and sell it, he ignored these records and instead relied on a different set of records showing that a particular jeweler in al-Labbān had purchased gold from the suspects

⁵⁵ "Gold Production," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 6, 1919, page 4.

⁵⁶ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 148 - 157.

on a number of occasions between November 1919 and November 1920. His preoccupation with the circulation of gold among subalterns became the primary explanation for the serial murders and the primary lens through which all evidence was evaluated.

Although tracing the movement of objects produced a couple of important leads, the inordinate attention given to the suspects' possessions ignored historical developments in Alexandria's sex trade and was therefore potentially misleading. Suspects who had expensive items in their possession or receipts revealing that they had sent a significant amount of money to their families in Upper Egypt were moved to the top of the list. The prosecutor did not entertain the possibility that the suspects may have accumulated these possessions from serving in the Labor Corps or from sex trafficking. As discussed in Chapter 1, regardless of whether native men joined the Labor Corps voluntarily or by force, they were better paid than their counterparts at home and were not required to spend their money on meals. Some of these men thus returned to Egypt with money they had saved up from the war. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 2, traffic in women and children from the countryside to major cities in Egypt had increased significantly in 1920 as a result of the acute economic crises and dislocations caused by the war. The investigation revealed that many of the suspects were involved in a trafficking network that linked Upper Egypt, Alexandria, Tanta and Damanhūr.⁵⁷ Yet the state prosecutor did not consider these potential sources of income, and those who could not account for their material possessions by proving that they had a steady job became the prime suspects in the murder case.

In addition to the emphasis on the suspects' sources of income, the state prosecutor used the criminal histories of the suspects as evidence of their culpability. Because he assumed that

⁵⁷ 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 180-181 and 225.

the murders were a product of banditry, those who had a criminal record of theft were considered more suspect than those whose criminal histories consisted mainly of street fights. ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf was notorious in al-Labbān for his longstanding record of petty theft, and despite the fact that the police found no evidence of wealth in his possession and no eyewitness testimony to his involvement in the murders other than that of Raya and Sakina, he was still considered a prime suspect.⁵⁸ The perpetrators were profiled based on assumptions about the nature of the crime, and ‘Abd al-Rāziq's criminal history matched the profile perfectly.

What determined the course of the investigation was the state prosecutor's focus on the crime and its perpetrators, with little regard for the victims. Although more information about the victims could have provided more clues about the nature of the crime, the state prosecutor was operating based on positivist understandings of crime as a product of either deviance or poverty. Yet the small amount of information provided about the victims in the testimonies of suspects, witnesses and family members highlights a few key similarities in the type of women targeted as well as the circumstances in which they were targeted. These details position the women and their death in the context of changing business practices in Alexandria's sex trade, presenting an opportunity to examine gender and sexual violence as a product of historically conditioned forces rather than deviance.

The Murder Victims

In early November 1920, after Sakina was evicted from the house on Makoris Street, her new neighbor, Fardūs, invited her to a bar where she planned to meet a tailor by the name of al-

⁵⁸ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 199.

Sayyid ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. Fardūs was a sex worker who had come from Tanta to Alexandria earlier in the year, possibly through a trafficking network.⁵⁹ Shortly after she began working for a Greek madam in the al-‘Aṭṭārīn district of Alexandria, she got involved with a British soldier named William Golding and left the brothel to live with him. At some point during the year, they lived in an apartment on Anastāsī Street, right above ‘Abd al-Raḥmān's tailor shop.⁶⁰ While William was at work one day, she agreed to meet ‘Abd al-Raḥmān at ‘Alī Fransāwī's bar, taking Sakina and a young servant girl along with her. According to eyewitnesses, Sakina and the young girl left the bar early, leaving Fardūs and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān together.⁶¹ Yet according to Raya's daughter, Fardūs was in Raya's home on ‘Alī Bek al-Kebīr Street later that afternoon, and Sakina was the one who gave her the drink that made her lose consciousness.⁶² Fardūs was the last victim to be murdered and buried in Raya's home.

The details about Fardūs' life and the circumstances of her murder raise questions about why she was targeted. Fardūs wore a significant amount of gold jewelry, some of it purchased by William, but she had also left her brothel, and the circumstances of her departure are unknown. Sakina and Fardūs had worked in the same red light district in Tanta, and they had several mutual friends in the sex trade.⁶³ Al-Sayyid ‘Abd al-Raḥmān also had a reputation for his involvement in the sex trade, so the fact that Fardūs was still meeting with him suggests that she may have retained her connection to this line of work.⁶⁴ She had also given ‘Abd al-Raḥmān her coat to

⁵⁹ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 512.

⁶⁰ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 187 - 188.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶² ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 177.

⁶³ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 516.

⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 94.

have it tailored and dyed, and when he failed to bring it to their meeting, she took a gold ring from him as collateral.⁶⁵ Fardūs' ambiguous connection to the sex trade at the time of her death makes it difficult to ascertain whether her murder was punitive or whether it was motivated by robbery.

According to Raya and Sakina's testimonies, the circumstances of Fardūs' murder are similar to those of the other victims, with the exception that some of the other victims were wearing very little gold. For the cases in which police reports were filed, the officer asked the family member how much gold and money the victim had with her at the time of her disappearance, and at least a couple of the reports do not indicate that the women were wearing a significant amount of gold. Zannūba bint Muḥammad Mūsa was wearing nothing more than a pair of gold-plated earrings,⁶⁶ and the police report for Nabawiyya bint ʿAlī filed by her husband does not make any reference to her jewelry.⁶⁷ Raya and Sakina's testimonies also note that some of the murder victims were relatively poor.⁶⁸ Although ʿĪsa mentions the fact that a number of the victims were not wearing a significant amount of gold, his narrative does not question the state prosecutor's assumption that the murders were motivated by robbery. Yet nearly all of the victims were involved, or had previously been involved, in the sex trade to varying degrees, and the details of this involvement suggest that regardless of the perpetrators' motives, the murders were conditioned upon historical changes in Alexandria's sex trade.

⁶⁵ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 188.

⁶⁶ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 331.

⁶⁷ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, Police Report dated 9/3/1920

⁶⁸ See ʿAbd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 59 for discussion of the murder of a streetwalker who sold peppers in an al-Labbān market.

As outlined in Chapter 2, prior to World War I, a significant percentage of sex workers in Alexandria had come from abroad, particularly from European countries. During the war, the decrease in European civilian migration to Alexandria due to the British army's monopolization of shipping routes⁶⁹ created spaces for more native women to get involved in the clandestine sex trade, particularly those whose families faced economic hardship as a result of the war. Many of these new sex workers such as Nabawiyya bint Gum‘a, the wife of an oil merchant, and Zannūba bint ‘Ulaywa, a widow who bought and sold chicken on the local market, were not connected to any particular brothel, and they engaged either in streetwalking and/or negotiated a commission rate with clandestine brothel owners.⁷⁰ The large waves of refugees coming from Syria and Palestine during the war also added to the increasing number of clandestine sex workers.⁷¹ Sex work became a means of channeling funds from the colonial army to native families and refugees, and most local officials, neighbors and relatives turned a blind eye to this practice during the war.

When World War I came to an end, opportunities for trafficking in women and children increased, and networks formed linking various cities across Egypt and abroad.⁷² Traffickers preferred young, unmarried women and girls who could be sold to brothels across the country,

⁶⁹ See Ministry of Finance, *Annual Return of Shipping*, 3. In 1913, 1,932 ships landed in Alexandria, while in 1917 and 1918, 346 and 339 ships landed in Alexandria, respectively. These were likely warships which did not carry civilians. Although trafficking was a concern for the colonial state at the beginning of the war, it did not appear to be a concern in 1917-1918, and few reports were produced about trafficking at this time.

⁷⁰ See ‘Īsa's narrative of the murder victims and their business relationship with Raya and Sakina in *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 231 - 532 ; See also "International Association for the Suppression of the White Traffic, Sub-Committee N, On the Conditions of Employment of Women Artistes in Places of Amusement in Cairo," January 2, 1918, FO 141/466/1, The National Archives of the UK Government, which claims that native artistes and prostitutes were not being exploited and that "being the best on the market can make their own terms."

⁷¹ *Egyptian Gazette*, January 13, 1915, 3.

⁷² See McBarnet, *The New Penal Code*, 381.

and sex workers who were married and/or had children became undesirable and dispensable. Streetwalkers and other independent sex workers also became particularly troublesome because their freedom and mobility was perceived as a threat to those who sought control over the sex trade. All of the women who were murdered in this case were thus highly mobile, and nearly all of them were independent sex workers who found their own clients and paid clandestine brothel owners a commission. Unlike sex workers who spent all their time at one brothel, their independence left them isolated from support networks within the sex trade. Younger sex workers who came from weak families and could easily be trafficked were not targeted for murder. Although they were vulnerable to various other forms of gender and sexual violence while they were under Raya, Sakina and Amīna's control,⁷³ it was the independent sex workers who were more likely to be murdered during this period. In the new postwar realities of Alexandria's sex trade, strength and power increased a woman's vulnerability.

In some cases, the murders involved suspicions of cheating the brothel owners out of their share of the commission. According to Raya and Sakina's testimonies, independent sex workers were required to give them half of what they received from their clients. Since sex workers were often paid in private, the brothel owners would usually accept whatever they were given, as long as it was not less than the market rate. In the case of the first murder victim, Khaḍra bint Muḥammad al-Lāmī, Raya noticed that she had bought a new set of gold bracelets in October 1919.⁷⁴ This led Raya to suspect that Khaḍra had been receiving more than the market rate from her clients and had therefore been cheating them out of their fair share of the

⁷³ See 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 219 for Shafīqa's testimony that 'Urābī and 'Abd al-Rāziq used to violently rape her in Raya's brothels.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

commission.⁷⁵ In November 1919, ‘Abd al-Rāziq attempted to take Khaḍra's gold bracelets by force during a sexual encounter between them, but his attempt failed and she made a scene.⁷⁶ A few days later, Khaḍra was murdered in Raya's home.

The altercation with a *fitiwwa* that preceded Khaḍra's murder was not unique. In many of the other cases, the victims had a dispute with a *fitiwwa* shortly before their murder. Whether or not the *fitiwwa* played an active role in these murders, the testimonies of suspects and witnesses indicate that the loss of the *fitiwwa*'s protection left sex workers increasingly vulnerable to violence. In June 1920, Anīsa bint Muḥammad Raḍwān accused ‘Abd al-Rāziq of taking her money and gold earrings while she was sleeping next to him one night. The next day, she filed a police report and insisted on finding out where he worked so that she could publicly shame him in front of his peers.⁷⁷ Shortly thereafter, she was murdered in Raya's home. Zannūba bint Muḥammad Mūsa also had an altercation with a *fitiwwa* shortly before her murder. As previously discussed, her brother told the police that two witnesses had seen a *fitiwwa* beating her with a sugar cane shortly before her disappearance. Unlike Anīsa, Zannūba was wearing very little gold at the time of her murder, suggesting that their altercation with a *fitiwwa* was the most significant factor in the decision to murder them.

Losing the protection of a *fitiwwa* also appeared to have played a role in the murder of Naẓla bint Abū al-Layl. Sakina testified that shortly before she was murdered, Naẓla had a fallout with ‘Urābī Ḥassān, the *fitiwwa* who had been in love with her. Ḥasab Allah told the state prosecutor that ‘Urābī was upset with Naẓla for being unfaithful to him during the period in

⁷⁵ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 252.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁷⁷ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 187.

which he had served in the Labor Corps,⁷⁸ but ‘Urābī mentioned that he had distanced himself from Nazla long before her disappearance due to the fact that she had fallen ill and had begun to lose her hair.⁷⁹ Raya's testimony suggests that she too had had a fallout with Nazla after she fell ill. She told the state prosecutor that Nazla used to live with her and Ḥasab Allah, and that she had even bought Nazla's gold jewelry for her.⁸⁰ Raya appears to have had more control over Nazla than the other murder victims by virtue of the fact that she had bought gold jewelry for her. The problems with Nazla appear to have begun when she became sick and went back to live with her mother. Her disease prevented her from performing the work that she was required to perform as a condition of accepting the gold jewelry, leaving her vulnerable to violence.

In a number of other cases, sex workers who appeared to have violated their agreements with the brothel owners by disappearing for long periods of time were also murdered. In February 1920, a sex worker named ‘Azīza brought a client to Raya's home after a long period of absence. Raya told the state prosecutor that she and ‘Azīza had made a special arrangement during the war in which ‘Azīza would bring her clients exclusively to Raya's brothel and she would give ‘Azīza a discount on the commission rate.⁸¹ ‘Azīza had honored this agreement during the war, but when she disappeared for a long period of time and reappeared with new gold jewelry, Raya suspected that she had been taking her clients elsewhere. ‘Azīza was consequently murdered that same day. Two weeks later, another sex worker named Nabawiyya who had worked for Raya during the war reappeared after a long absence, and she too was murdered,

⁷⁸ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 265.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁸⁰ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 341.

⁸¹ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 299.

despite the fact that she was wearing very little gold.⁸² The circumstances of Nabawiyya's murder suggests that the disappearance of the sex workers for long periods of time played a greater role in their murder than the amount of gold that they wore.

Sex workers who continued to work for Raya and Sakina after the war while simultaneously frequenting other brothels were also targeted for murder. In the case of an older sex worker named Nabawiyya bint Gum‘a, her husband told the state prosecutor that one witness had seen her going to a brothel in al-‘Aṭṭārīn shortly before her disappearance, and another witness had seen her standing next to Sakina at the Friday market one afternoon.⁸³ Some of the suspects stated that Nabawiyya had continued to work for Raya after the war, yet her husband stated that he had seen Ḥasab Allah standing outside his home the night before his wife's disappearance, suggesting that Nabawiyya may not have been working for Raya and Sakina regularly and had to be summoned.⁸⁴ Because it became more difficult to find regular clients after the war, sex workers like Nabawiyya sought to maximize their income by frequenting multiple brothels, a practice which angered brothel owners.

Like Nabawiyya bint Gum‘a, many streetwalkers congregated at the busy Friday market in al-Labbān, and their mobility was perceived as a threat to those who were trying to monopolize the sex trade in their neighborhood. A streetwalker by the name of Khadīga used to find all her clients at this market, yet she was not associated with Raya and Sakina's brothels. Amīna brought her to Raya's home one day at the request of a client, and she was murdered

⁸² Ibid., 308.

⁸³ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 471.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 476.

immediately thereafter.⁸⁵ Since she was not wearing a significant amount of gold, the decision to murder her was likely based on her role as a business competitor. A couple of weeks later, Zannūba bint ‘Ulaywa the chicken dealer was also murdered for her activities as a streetwalker. According to Sakina's testimony, Zannūba had been one of her longtime closest friends in Alexandria, and although her primary job was buying and selling chicken, she occasionally engaged in streetwalking to supplement her income,⁸⁶ particularly when the price of meat soared in Egypt both during and after the war. Zannūba was highly mobile as a result of her primary trade, and her sex work was likely not confined to a particular neighborhood. The frequent crossing of spatial boundaries imagined by those who sought to control the sex trade made streetwalkers a primary threat to their socioeconomic power.

The threat of competition also appears to have played an important role in the murder of Fāṭima bint Muḥammad ‘Abd Rabbu, the most popular servant broker in al-Labbān. As discussed in Chapter 2, despite its dim realities, domestic service was perceived as a more respectable profession for young women and girls, and Fāṭima was thus in direct competition with brothel owners for female bodies. Colonial state records note that after the war had come to an end, the line between sex work and domestic service had become blurred as a result of the development of trafficking networks in which procurers posed as servants' registry agents and then sold young women and girls to brothels around the country.⁸⁷ Although the investigation records do not indicate that Fāṭima was involved in sex trafficking, it is clear that many of the suspects were, and Fāṭima's widely acknowledged success as a servant broker threatened their

⁸⁵ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 435.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 442; ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 204.

⁸⁷ McBarnet, *The New Penal Code*, 381 - 382.

control over female bodies in al-Labbān. Sakina also alleged in her testimony that Fāṭima occasionally engaged in streetwalking herself,⁸⁸ which was perceived by the suspects as another form of competition. The investigation records thus indicate that regardless of the amount of gold the victims were wearing, the desire to control female bodies in al-Labbān and to monopolize the sex trade played a primary role in deciding which women to murder.

The decision to target competitors and independent sex workers suggests that the murders were not a product of banditry, but rather a calculated move designed to increase the perpetrators' control over the clandestine sex trade. This observation is strengthened by the fact that the suspects claimed the money they had received from selling the victims' jewelry and belongings usually ranged from nothing to a couple of pounds.⁸⁹ As discussed in Chapter 2, a number of the suspects were also actively involved in establishing full control over younger sex workers and selling them to brothels around the country after the war, providing further incentive for them to remove older, more independent sex workers from the market. Many of the women who were murdered had been newcomers to the clandestine sex trade in Alexandria during and after the war, and as Will Hanley notes, "much crime was due to unfamiliarity."⁹⁰ This unfamiliarity was a result of not only the mobility of the sex workers, but also the changing social landscape of the immediate post-WWI era. The absence of many neighborhood strongmen in al-Labbān in 1917-1918 due to their service in the British Army's Labor Corps enabled new sex workers to navigate the market with a degree of independence and mobility, and the attempts made by the

⁸⁸ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 204.

⁸⁹ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 703.

⁹⁰ Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria," 44.

local strongmen to reassert control over the sex trade after they returned from the war created new conditions of employment which the murdered sex workers had attempted to challenge.

The historic shift in Alexandria's clandestine sex trade prompted by wartime dynamics suggests that the responsibility for the murders lay with those who controlled the trade at this time. At the time of the murders, how much control did Raya, Sakina and Amīna exercise over the clandestine brothels they operated? How much control did their husbands and the *fitiwwa* exercise over these spaces? How did relations of power between the suspects shape their role in the murders? Although the testimonies of suspects and witnesses give some insight into these power relations, the state prosecutor did not investigate the dynamics of the sex trade because he believed the murders to be a product of banditry rather than a component of a business venture. He therefore choose to search for culprits who fit the model of the unreformable criminal - feebleminded, unemployed, and addicted to sex, drugs and alcohol. Social scientific theories of criminality inscribed onto the concept of *al-ashqīyā* played a greater role in determining the outcome of the investigation than knowledge of the sex trade and the circumstances in which the murders had occurred.

In Search of the Unreformable Criminals

‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf was well-known in al-Labbān for his long history of petty thefts, street fights and hashish smuggling.⁹¹ He also had a reputation for beating and raping women whenever he got drunk or high.⁹² As discussed in Chapter 1, ‘Abd al-Rāziq and his childhood

⁹¹ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 199.

⁹² ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 183.

friend, Muḥammad Khafāga, were known as the *fitiwwa* of Ḥāret al-Nagāh in al-Labbān, one of the quarters in which Raya, Sakina and Amīna had operated a joint business after the war.

Although this quarter was home to many Ṣa‘īdī immigrants, and although many of the suspects detained in this investigation were Ṣa‘īdī, ‘Abd al-Rāziq and Muḥammad Khafāga were born and raised in al-Labbān and did not have a connection to Upper Egypt. Despite the fact that they were both *fitiwwa*, Muḥammad Khafāga owned a dairy business and did not have a criminal history, while ‘Abd al-Rāziq worked as a carriage driver and had a fifteen-year criminal record. While Muḥammad Khafāga's dairy business grew during the war, ‘Abd al-Rāziq had difficulty finding work at the port and struggled with irregular employment. Yet the divergent backgrounds and experiences of these two men did not stop them from visiting brothels together and going on double dates with their lovers. The bond of both friendship and rivalry which they shared as *fitiwwa* cut across class boundaries.

While witnesses and suspects identified both ‘Abd al-Rāziq and Muḥammad Khafāga as *fitiwwa*, the title of *ashqīyā*’ was applied only to ‘Abd al-Rāziq. An immigrant from South Eastern Anatolia by the name of Hanna Ya‘cūb Hakim told the state prosecutor that people like himself could not speak to ‘Abd al-Rāziq because he was one of the *fitiwwa* and *ashqīyā*’.⁹³ When the state prosecutor asked what specifically ‘Abd al-Rāziq did to earn the title of *ashqīyā*’, Hanna responded that he would get drunk, cause fights, and incite riots in stores (*ya ‘mal hayajān fī al-maḥallāt*).⁹⁴ Given the colonial state's understanding of the *ashqīyā*’ as a rural phenomenon grounded in mobility and lack of visibility, the application of this label to a native-born

⁹³ Ibid., 216.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Alexandrian led to a moment of perplexity for the state prosecutor, prompting him to ask the witness for clarification about ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s *shaqāwa*. This request for clarification reveals that the line between the *fitiwwa* and the *ashqīyā’* was still palpable in the early interwar period. Hanna’s conflation of the urban tradition of *fitiwwa* with images of the rural bandit may have been a result of his own unfamiliarity with the land to which he had immigrated, or it may have been a product of a new historical moment in which the dislocations of the war and the spread of nationalist organizing had softened the rural-urban divide both physically and discursively. Although the reimagination of the *fitiwwa* as urban gangsters and the shift in the dominant discourse about criminality from *shaqāwa* to *fitwāna* would not become a prominent trend until later in the interwar period, Hanna’s statement symbolizes the early moments of this discursive boundary crossing.

While the state prosecutor had already profiled Ḥasab Allah as one of the *ashqīyā’* based on his Ṣa‘īdī background and his alleged exile from Kafr al-Zayyāt for theft,⁹⁵ the question of whether or not ‘Abd al-Rāziq should also be labeled an *ashqīyā’* was not his primary concern. By this time, the colonial state had bifurcated the concept of the habitual offender into those who were capable of reform and those who weren’t, and the character of the suspects became the determining factor in their culpability. Although the dislocation of the peasantry during the war may have sparked fears about the spread of banditry to major Egyptian cities, what the state prosecutor was most concerned about was the behavior of the urban poor. He was thus primarily interested in the frequency with which ‘Abd al-Rāziq engaged in illicit activities. He asked witnesses not only if ‘Abd al-Rāziq smoked hashish, but how much hashish he would smoke in

⁹⁵ Rizk, "The Women Killers."

one sitting.⁹⁶ He was also particularly interested in the numerous stories about ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s alleged rapes.⁹⁷ Although his extensive criminal history may have earned him the title of *ashiqiya’* among immigrants living in al-Labbān, it was ‘Abd al-Rāziq’s apparent addiction to hashish and sex that made him an unreformable criminal in the eyes of the state. The state prosecutor expressed similar concerns about Sakina’s alcoholism and her numerous lovers. The owner of Sakina’s regular bar, *Spiro*, identified her as an alcoholic who could drink 10 - 15 glasses of wine in one hour without passing out,⁹⁸ and Sakina spoke openly about the multiple lovers she slept with after her divorce, including her ex-husband.⁹⁹ Addiction to drugs, sex and alcohol became the hallmark of a permanent state of criminality, and the state prosecutor interpreted this condition as a primary indicator of guilt.

Among the male suspects in this investigation, employment and intelligence also served as the dividing line between guilt and innocence. Although Muḥammad Khafāga and ‘Abd al-Rāziq had both been implicated in the murder of Anīsa,¹⁰⁰ the fact that Muḥammad Khafāga owned a dairy business and frequently referred to his wealth during his testimony made him an unlikely perpetrator in the eyes of the state prosecutor, and thus he was never placed on the suspect list. He was also intelligent, literate, and articulate, and he managed to construct a convincing narrative in which he presented himself as the heroic *fitiwwa* of al-Labbān and ‘Abd al-Rāziq as the notorious villain.¹⁰¹ As a carriage driver who had difficulty finding regular

⁹⁶ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 183.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 183 and 219.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 183 - 189.

employment, ‘Abd al-Rāziq's apparent lack of productivity and excessive amount of leisure time made him a more likely participant in the alleged gang robberies. The state prosecutor also found ‘Abd al-Rāziq's stories about Raya's deep-seated hatred for him both illogical and unconvincing,¹⁰² despite the fact that he and Raya engaged in arguments in front of the state prosecutor.¹⁰³ ‘Abd al-Rāziq's identity as a day laborer and his inability to find steady work after the war left him vulnerable to identification as an unreformable criminal - unproductive, feeble-minded, and addicted to illicit activities - and this identity in turn left him vulnerable to allegations of murder in the absence of evidence.

Employment and intelligence similarly served as a measure of culpability in the case of Aḥmad al-Gidr and ‘Urābī Ḥassān, another pair of rival *ftiwwa* who lived in the neighborhood of Gnaynat al-‘Uyūnī in al-Labbān. Aḥmad and ‘Urābī had both moved to Alexandria from the village of Abanūb in Upper Egypt prior to the war, and their street fights earned them the title of *ftiwwa*. Throughout the first half of the investigation, Raya implicated both of them in the majority of the murders that happened in her home, arguing that they would bring the victims to her home and then send her away for a couple of hours. However, although both Aḥmad and ‘Urābī had criminal records, Aḥmad was able to deflect the state prosecutors' suspicions by claiming that he had a permanent position as a manager at the port and that he was so busy he did not have a single day off.¹⁰⁴ He emphasized that he was in a better financial position than the other suspects who could not find steady work, thereby invoking the state prosecutor's assumptions about criminality to argue for his innocence. Even though his daughter worked as a

¹⁰² Ibid., 164.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 225.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 200.

domestic servant, he managed to convince the state prosecutor that he was neither desperate nor foolish enough to participate in such a crime, and he was eventually stricken from the suspect list after Raya agreed to remove him from her narrative of the murders.¹⁰⁵ In the end, the only *fitiwwa* who remained in Raya's narrative were 'Abd al-Rāziq and 'Urābī, the ones who had the fewest resources and the most difficulty finding steady work. In spite of their denials, the state prosecutor charged these two *fitiwwa* as perpetrators of the murders based on no evidence other than Raya and Sakina's testimonies. The other *fitiwwa* who laid claim to a middle-class work ethic successfully navigated the criminal justice system to protect themselves and turn the system against their weaker rivals, in turn bolstering their hegemony.

While the potential for productivity served as the primary measure of culpability among male suspects, vulnerability served as the primary measure of culpability among female suspects. As discussed in the newspaper *al-Baṣīr* at the beginning of the murder trial in May 1921, women who committed crimes had traditionally been treated more leniently than men under the law because they were seen as victims of circumstance and thus deserving of greater mercy.¹⁰⁶ Yet this status of vulnerability was not granted to all women equally. Female vulnerability was largely determined by adherence to gender and sexual norms, and these norms were both racialized and classed. Women who violated these norms were seen as less vulnerable and less deserving of protection under the law. In the early interwar period, these social norms were in flux. While sex work in Egypt had become an increasingly common means of earning a living during World War I, those who profited from the sex trade were seen as criminal in the eyes of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 201 - 202.

¹⁰⁶ "Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina [The Trial of Raya and Sakina]," *al-Baṣīr*, May 11, 1921, 2.

the colonial state long before the criminalization of prostitution in Egypt in 1949. In the early interwar period, colonial officials such as Judge A.C. McBarnet labeled prostitution 'quasi-criminal' on the grounds that it posed a threat to the strength and stability of the state.¹⁰⁷ As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, the rise of middle-class rule in Egypt in the interwar period also contributed to the de facto criminalization of the sex trade. In the field of criminology, this perception of the sex trade was validated by social scientists such as Cesare Lombroso who argued that prostitutes and female criminals were equivalent in character.¹⁰⁸ While social scientists, legal officials and anti-prostitution activists depicted young women who turned to prostitution due to economic deprivation as vulnerable victims of circumstance, they simultaneously depicted older women who allegedly profited from the sex trade as deviants who were by nature criminal. The discourse of female criminality was thus based on racialized, sexualized, gendered and classed understandings of female vulnerability, and this discourse shaped the state prosecutor's assumptions about which female suspects were responsible for the murders and which ones were not.

Although there were initially several women on the state prosecutor's suspect list, four women emerged as potential conspirators to the murders over the course of the investigation: Raya, Sakina, Amīna and 'Adīla. According to Raya and Sakina's testimonies, the role of the women was to buy food and alcohol for the perpetrators and their victim and then sell the victim's jewelry after her death.¹⁰⁹ No female suspects were alleged to have been present during the execution of the murders. Since clients regularly requested food and alcohol from Raya and

¹⁰⁷ McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Lombroso, *The Female Offender*, 100.

¹⁰⁹ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 697.

Sakina, Raya told the state prosecutor that it was not always clear in advance when the perpetrators intended to kill a sex worker, and sometimes she did not know about a murder until she was given the victim's jewelry and instructed to sell it.¹¹⁰ The role of the female suspects in plotting the murders thus remained unclear throughout the entire investigation. In fact, it was never clear during the investigation who had plotted the murders, how far in advance they had been plotted, or whether they had even been plotted at all. In his narrative of the case, Salāḥ ʿĪsa deals with this gap in the testimonies by centering Raya as either the decision-maker or the messenger of an order to kill, although at times he presents the murder plot as a last-minute, democratic decision made by a few of the suspects and communicated through non-verbal cues such as winks or nudges. However, the trial records state that Raya gave contradictory testimonies during the investigation and did not confess to plotting the murders before the state prosecutor.¹¹¹ In spite of the ambiguities and contradictions in the testimonies of the suspects, the state prosecutor decided to treat the murders as a premeditated criminal conspiracy. As in the case of the male suspects, the determination of the involvement of the female suspects and their responsibility for the murders was based primarily on the state prosecutor's assessment of their life and character.

The intersectionality of sexuality and class played a decisive role in determining which of the four women had played a role in the murders. Although Raya insisted that ʿAdīla had also been involved in the sale of the victims' jewelry,¹¹² the state prosecutor did not charge ʿAdīla as an accomplice to the murders. The dividing line between ʿAdīla and the other three female

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ ʿAbd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 321.

¹¹² Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 700.

suspects was in the way in which she constructed her sexuality and her relationship to the sex trade in her testimony. According to Raya and Sakina, ‘Adīla had engaged in prostitution regularly both during and after the war, charging her clients a significant amount of money based on her higher social standing.¹¹³ Yet ‘Adīla told the state prosecutor that her primary source of income came from renting land that she had inherited from her father, and that she also received financial support from her three sons, who all had permanent jobs.¹¹⁴ She insisted that she did not work as a prostitute and that her occasional involvement with Raya's brothels was solely for the purpose of meeting with her former lover, Muḥammad Khafāga. ‘Adīla constructed her innocence at the intersection of sexuality and class, presenting herself as a woman who had a steady source of income from the men in her family, unlike the other female suspects who lived off the proceeds of prostitution. She also expressed embarrassment over her involvement in occasional illicit activities, which stood in stark contrast to Sakina's bold statements about sleeping with multiple lovers and Raya's frank discussions about her role as a procurer in the sex trade.¹¹⁵ Unlike Raya and Sakina, ‘Adīla ascribed to the gender, sexual and class norms that were familiar to the state prosecutor, and thus he believed that she was unlikely to participate in criminal activities.

Like ‘Adīla, Amīna bint Mansūr also attempted to distance herself from the sex trade in her testimony in an attempt to convince the state prosecutor of her innocence. Yet Amīna did not

¹¹³ ‘Īsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 128.

¹¹⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 161.

¹¹⁵ Women who lied or committed illegal acts to protect their reputation were treated more leniently by legal officials. In her study of the prosecution of infanticide in Brazil, Cassia Roth notes that when a woman committed infanticide to "hide her dishonor," she received a lighter sentence. See "Murdering Mothers: Infanticide, Madness and the Law, Rio de Janeiro, 1890 - 1940," UCLA Center for the Study of Women Newsletter (Winter 2015), accessed March 2016, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6sd3m64b>

succeed in her defense because several suspects and witnesses attested to the fact that she rented her home to clandestine sex workers and that she was involved in the sale of young sex workers like ‘Aisha and Sammāra to brothels in Damanhūr.¹¹⁶ The al-Labbān police also found a corpse underneath her home and a bracelet that had belonged to a murder victim in her possession.¹¹⁷ Yet despite all of this evidence against her, and despite the fact that she was the only female suspect in possession of jewelry that had belonged to one of the victims, the state prosecutor decided to charge Amīna with life in prison while charging Raya and Sakina with the death penalty. The difference in the charges against these three female accomplices likely relates in part to Amīna's job as the manager of the waqf property that Raya and Sakina had rented in Ḥāret al-Nagāh.¹¹⁸ Although Amīna's claim that she was not involved in the sex trade was refuted by witness testimonies, she had another permanent job that provided her with steady resources and a degree of social status, which was a benefit that Raya and Sakina did not have. Amīna's job as a property manager thus mitigated her responsibility for the murders, despite the fact that her sale of sex workers to brothels in Damanhūr made it clear that she too had profited from the sex trade.

The difference in the punishments ascribed to Raya, Sakina and Amīna also sheds light on the intersection of race, gender, sexuality and class in constructions of female criminality in early interwar Egypt. Unlike Amīna who was born and raised in Alexandria, Raya and Sakina had migrated to Alexandria from Upper Egypt at the beginning of WWI and the investigation records reveal that they had retained much of their local dialect. As discussed in Chapter 1, this

¹¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 180.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

study treats urban discourse about Upper Egyptians as a racialized discourse that extends beyond the rural-urban divide. As Martina Rieker shows in her work, the urban middle-class in Egypt has inherited a colonial state discourse that represents Upper Egyptians as hot-tempered, vengeful, feeble-minded, prone to violence, and wholly distinct in character from their rural counterparts in Lower Egypt.¹¹⁹ This characterization encompasses both Ṣa‘īdī men and women, as Ṣa‘īdī women have historically been represented as stronger and more masculinized than urban women. This racialization of Ṣa‘īdī women has shaped legal understandings of their vulnerability, and thus despite the fact that both Raya and Sakina claimed that their husbands and the *fitiwwa* beat them and threatened to kill them if they spoke a word to anyone about the murders,¹²⁰ the state prosecutor believed that the sisters were too strong to be abused or intimidated. Given the fact that they were working-class women, the state prosecutor may also have assumed that they were accustomed to this degree of violence, which Amira Sonbol argues was a common perception among judges in Egypt.¹²¹ Raya and Sakina's perceived lack of vulnerability as working-class, Ṣa‘īdī women was compounded by what the state prosecutor saw as their violation of gender and sexual norms. Sakina's reputation for spending day and night in bars and buying food and alcohol for her lovers was particularly shocking to the state prosecutor,¹²² as was Raya's unbridled use of foul language throughout the investigation.¹²³ Raya

¹¹⁹ Martina Rieker, "The Sa‘id and the City: Subaltern Spaces in the Making of Modern Egyptian History" (PhD diss., Temple University, 1997).

¹²⁰ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 347.

¹²¹ Amira El Azhary Sonbol, "Law and Gender Violence in Ottoman and Modern Egypt" in *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*, ed. Amira El Azhary Sonbol (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 283.

¹²² ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 90.

¹²³ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 341. According to these records, Raya regularly used the phrases *bint al-kalb* and *bint al-sharmūta* during the investigation.

and Sakina's deviance was theorized at the intersection of race, sexuality, gender and class, leading to their identification as unreformable criminals deserving of execution.

The fact that the state prosecutor decided to charge Raya and Sakina with the death penalty despite their claim that their involvement in the crime had been secured through physical coercion suggests that modern constructions of criminality arising from the discipline of positivist criminology were central to legal understandings of female agency. The positivization of Egyptian law in the colonial period and the discourse of criminality upheld the human as agent without taking into consideration the constraints placed on agency. Gender, class, race and sexuality were employed as normative constructs in the determination of criminal responsibility rather than as power structures that limited the choices available to the suspects, and thus the discourse of female criminality replaced the discourse of women as victims of circumstance in the early interwar period. Yet rather than viewing the corpses in Raya and Sakina's homes as evidence of their active involvement in the murders, the state prosecutor could have interpreted the corpses as a symbol of Raya and Sakina's limited agency. As Aḥmad al-Gidr told the state prosecutor, he would never have consented to the burial of murdered women in his home even if someone had offered to pay him a thousand pounds,¹²⁴ the implication being that either Raya and Sakina were incomprehensibly foolish and desperate enough to allow their homes to be used as a graveyard in exchange for very little money, or they did not have a choice in the matter. The use of Raya and Sakina's homes as the main dumping grounds for the corpses may thus have been a sign of their weakness rather than their strength, and this weakness was further evidenced by the fact that the state ultimately held the sisters responsible for the corpses.

¹²⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 201.

On January 23, 1921, after more than two months of continuous interrogations, the state prosecutor decided to charge seven suspects with the death penalty for premeditated murder: Raya and her ex-husband Ḥasab Allah, Sakina and her ex-husband Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, Sakina's former lover Salāma Muḥammad al-Kabt, and two working-class *fitiwwa* ‘Urābī Ḥassān and ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf. The state prosecutor also charged Amīna bint Mansūr, her husband Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Qaddūs, and the gold dealer ‘Ali Muḥammad Ḥasan as accomplices to the murders. Salāma, ‘Urābī, ‘Abd al-Rāziq, Amīna and her husband Muḥammad had denied any involvement or knowledge of the murders, and Raya and Sakina had confessed only to passive involvement in the crime as a consequence of coercion. Ḥasab Allah and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl had confessed to killing a few women while pinning the blame for their involvement on Raya and Sakina. The constant denials and conflicting testimonies suggest that the state prosecutor's assumptions about criminality were more of a reflection of social concerns than an accurate indicator of culpability. In the early interwar period, the concept of the unreformable criminal was based on concerns about male productivity and female domesticity, and as will be discussed further in Chapter 4, these concerns paralleled middle-class nationalist discourse about the undisciplined poor and uncivilized women in early twentieth-century Egypt. The discourse of criminality that emerged during this period was thus grounded in not only a colonial logic, but also a middle-class logic. While this chapter analyzed the construction of criminality in early interwar Egypt, the next chapter will highlight the middle-class concerns that gave rise to this criminality discourse and how the discussion of these concerns in the media criminalized Raya and Sakina long before the state prosecutor had decided whom to hold responsible for the murders.

Chapter 4

The Politicization of Morality: The Gender, Sexual and Spatial Politics of Middle-Class Formation

In mid-November 1920, newspapers in Cairo and Alexandria began reporting the discovery of several corpses buried underneath Raya and Sakina's homes. Within a few days of the initial reports, Raya and Sakina became the primary focus of the media coverage about the case, despite the fact that there were twenty-two suspects on the state prosecutor's list. On November 28, 1920, some newspapers such as *Wādī al-Nīl* published police photographs of Raya and Sakina, ignoring the photographs that had been taken of the other suspects.¹ The daily news coverage of the case frequently misrepresented the details of the investigation to dramatize the role of the sisters in the murders. Middle-class nationalists had decided that Raya and Sakina were guilty from the moment they received news of the investigation, and the media's focus on the two women created the impression that they were ultimately responsible for planning and executing the murders. Even after the sisters eventually revealed that the perpetrators had forced them to stay silent about the murders, many journalists misrepresented the details of their testimonies, in some cases explicitly naming Raya as the main perpetrator of the crime.² When it came time for the trial, Egyptian newspapers published articles arguing that even though no woman had ever received the death penalty in Egypt, Raya and Sakina should be executed for the crime. On May

¹ "Silsilat al-Jarā'im fi Buyūt al-Hilāk [The Series of Crimes in the Houses of Destruction]," *Wādī al-Nīl*, November 28, 1920, 3.

² Ibid.

16, 1921, the judges decided to execute the sisters as accomplices to the murders, making Raya and Sakina the first women in Egyptian history to receive the death penalty.



Figure 4.1: Mug shots of Raya (left) and Sakina (right) published in *Wādī al-Nīl* on November 28, 1920

While the previous chapter discussed the state prosecutor's reliance on middle-class norms to determine the culpability of the suspects, this chapter will analyze the moral panic that led to Raya and Sakina's execution, and its relationship to middle class formation and the spread of middle-class modernity in Egypt. As Shaun Lopez shows in "Madams, Murders and the Media," the investigation of the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case sparked a number of discussions in the Egyptian media about prostitution, alcohol, and the dangers of women in public space.³ Egyptian journalists linked the spread of prostitution and alcohol to colonial rule in Egypt, arguing that colonialism had caused the moral degeneration of the nation and that the case highlighted the urgent need for national independence. Yet Lopez also argues that the case

³ Shaun T. Lopez, "Madams, Murders, and the Media: Akhbar al-Hawadith and the Emergence of a Mass Culture in 1920s Egypt," in *Re-envisioning Egypt, 1919 - 1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt et al (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2005), 371 - 397.

marked the development of a 'truly mass culture' in Egypt which was characterized by 'shared concerns' between lower-class Egyptians and elites. He states that the case was a shared experience because the illiterate lower classes were also consumers of the press through public readings of newspapers and gossip. Although it is possible that the story of the case had also grasped the attention of subalterns in the early interwar period, it is difficult to prove that the moral panic about the case extended far beyond the imagination of Egypt's effendiyya in 1920 - 21, or that subalterns and elites shared a similar understanding of the case. Ziad Fahmy shows that prior to the interwar period, Egyptian national identity and experiences were popularized through colloquial songs, plays and poems,⁴ but there is no evidence that any such popular media was produced about this murder case in the early interwar period. The widespread familiarity with the case today, both in Egypt and in many other parts of the Middle East, is likely a product of the numerous films that have been produced since the 1950s about the two female accomplices, Raya and Sakina. Projecting this popularity back to the interwar period as part of a 'mass culture' is therefore teleological.

Regardless of how much attention the case received from subalterns in 1920 - 21, the analysis of the case as a 'shared concern' inadvertently reifies and homogenizes the nation that was imagined by the Egyptian middle class at this time. Although Lopez's goal is to ascribe agency to the lower classes by showing that they too played an integral role in the formation of a national culture, the way in which he attempts to achieve this goal overlooks the relations of power embedded in nation-state formation. There is little evidence that the majority of subalterns shared middle class concerns with moral regeneration or that they saw prostitution and alcohol as

⁴ See Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

a threat to the nation during this period. In fact, the use of newspapers to study 'the public sphere' during this period reflects an inherent middle-class bias, and it is more appropriate to speak of multiple public spheres - many of which are not accessible to the historian through written texts. This chapter thus argues that the outcry about the case in the media was primarily a middle class concern rather than a 'shared concern,' and that the eventual popularization of concerns about morality was the product of a long and concerted effort by both colonial officials and the Egyptian middle class. The eventual creation of a mass culture through media was consequently a political process marked by classed, gendered and sexual relations of power rather than a product of shared concerns and understandings. Whereas Lopez's study makes a distinction between the moral and the political, this study argues that the moral *is* political.

The politicization of morality in the media discourse about the serial murder case had its roots in existing colonial and middle class concerns. As mentioned in Chapter 2, British colonial officials believed that the family was the foundation of state power, which made the domestic sphere central to the construction of state power.⁵ In her book, *Nurturing the Nation*, Lisa Pollard illustrates that reforming the domestic sphere was one of the means by which the British colonial regime legitimized its occupation of Egypt, and that Egyptian nationalists adopted this logic of domestic reform as the basis of nation-state formation. In this sense, Egyptian nationalists "nurtured" the nation into existence. Pollard describes her work as "a case study of what happens to the tropes of colonial discourse once subject populations are exposed to them."⁶ While she shows that reforming domestic and marital relations was central to both colonial and nationalist

⁵ A.C. McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 7.

⁶ Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*, 11.

politics, the treatment of Egyptian morality discourse as derivative of colonial discourse overlooks the fact that morality also played a central role in the domestic politics of colonial powers. As will be shown below, the politicization of morality was not only the means by which Britain exercised power over colonized peoples; it was also the means by which middle classes around the world constructed themselves. Thus, rather than viewing the politicization of morality as a colonial discourse, it is more appropriate to theorize it as a middle-class discourse. Morality was a mode of governmentality that was central to both middle-class formation and the legitimization of middle-class rule.

While media discussions about the serial murder case reflected existing colonial and middle-class nationalist discourse about the necessity of reforming the domestic sphere, they also marked a turning point. The demonization of Raya and Sakina in the Egyptian press represented a new preoccupation with subaltern threats to the middle-class family. Reforming the domestic sphere entailed stopping the spread of vice, and stopping the spread of vice entailed hardening the boundary between subalterns and the middle class. The porous boundary between workers and the petite bourgeoisie and their interaction in the fluid spaces of Alexandria's bars, brothels and *sūqs* became a growing concern for both the colonial state and the Egyptian middle class, and the denunciation of these spaces in media discussions about the Alexandria serial murder case reflected a new panic about the corruption of middle-class women. Reports about the case in the media were accompanied by regular editorials analyzing the political and social conditions that gave rise to the serial murders and the social ills that brought respectable women into illicit spaces. The editorials revealed a consensus among Egyptian middle-class nationalists that the cause of the murders was the spread of vice, particularly among women. The question thus

became not how to change society to stop the spread of murder, but rather how to change society to stop the spread of vice. Among the numerous solutions mentioned in the editorials were bringing an end to colonial rule, ending the state licensing of prostitution, limiting women's presence in public space, and socializing women to avoid the various activities that might lead them to enter into illicit spaces. The desire was not to reform the domestic habits of the working poor but rather to reform the domestic habits of middle-class women by keeping them away from working poor. The gendered and sexual morality of women thus became the dividing line between subalterns and the middle class.

The media discourse about the serial murder case thus marked not the creation of a mass culture, but rather the creation of a middle-class culture characterized by the exclusion of subalterns like Raya and Sakina. Raya and Sakina were not the women that Egyptian nationalists were interested in reforming; they were the women that Egyptian nationalists wanted to keep away from the middle class. The sisters' success at navigating the fluid boundary between workers and the petite bourgeoisie is precisely why Egyptian nationalists found them so threatening. The press thus transformed Raya and Sakina into deceitful subalterns who lured middle-class women into their homes to murder them and steal their gold. This discourse had an important effect on the legal outcome of the case, for although there was a similar serial murder case in Tanta at the same time, the women who were allegedly involved in the Tanta case were not held responsible for the crime by the legal system or the media.⁷ As this chapter will show, it was Raya and Sakina's crossing of boundaries rather than their role in the murders that led to their execution.

⁷ See Rizk, "The Women Killers."

The response to the murder case shows that constructing the Egyptian nation did not only entail "nurturing" the governed. The execution of six suspects in this case on the basis of inconsistent testimonies and inconclusive evidence made it clear that middle-class nationalists believed there were some people who could not be nurtured, reformed or governed. The purpose of the criminal justice system was no longer to rectify the harm suffered by victims and their families but rather to decide who was capable of being reformed and governed and who was not. The job of the state was to keep this unreformable, ungovernable class away from respectable society. The politicization of morality in both the legal and media response to the murder case thus marked an attempt to define the boundary of the middle class from below. While existing literature on the Egyptian middle class focuses on its discursive formation and the way in which gender and sexuality was integral to this process,⁸ what has not yet been explored is how this discursive formation was achieved through the erection of spatial, material, and cultural boundaries that attempted to divide the nascent middle class from the working poor. These boundaries solidified the position of the petite bourgeoisie within the category of the middle class while simultaneously subalternizing workers, and these class divisions were mapped onto the urban landscape of Alexandria with a new town planning scheme adopted immediately after the murder trial. This chapter examines the dialectic between the discursive, material and spatial construction of the Egyptian middle class in the early interwar period, highlighting the way in which the response to the murder case was integral to the spread of middle-class modernity in Egypt.

⁸ See Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*; Jacob, *Working out Egypt*; Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*.

Situating Egypt's 'Moral Panic' in World History

Although Lopez presents the moral panic about Raya and Sakina as a uniquely Egyptian phenomenon grounded in Islamic assumptions about female sexuality, situating the morality discourse of the Egyptian middle class in a global context reveals that the rise of moral panics after World War I was integral to middle-class formation in newly emerging nation states around the world. Morality discourses were an important component of post-WWI reconstruction, and the early interwar period saw the rise of moral regeneration campaigns both in Europe and in colonized societies affected by the war. For example, in France, moral regeneration took the form of a campaign for 'moral disarmament' led by French schoolteachers who sought to undo the pervasive and totalizing effects of militarization on the worldview of children both during and after World War I.⁹ The campaign critiqued the cultural and psychological legacies of the war by using propaganda to denounce activities such as war games, popularizing messages such as 'if you want your children to live, prepare them for moral disarmament.'¹⁰ The French campaign for moral disarmament paralleled broader middle-class concerns about morality echoed by many anti-vice movements around the world, including Prohibition in the United States and anti-prostitution campaigns in newly emerging nation-states, such as India, Egypt, Ireland and

⁹ See Mona Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism, and Patriotism, 1914 - 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ "Enfants ne Jouez pas à la Guerre," World War I Exhibit, Nantes History Museum, Chateau des ducs de Bretagne, accessed February 2014.

Poland.¹¹ The fight against illicit trade also became one of the most pressing concerns for the League of Nations, which pushed all of its members to criminalize male involvement in the sex trade in the 1930s. Although much scholarship has shown that middle class concerns with morality were not new to the interwar period,¹² what *is* new to this historical period is the success of the middle class in harnessing morality as a mode of governmentality, a success made possible by new wartime technologies of propaganda and surveillance as well as postwar concerns about the breakdown of traditional family structures. As victorious nations and their colonies struggled with the legacies of war and military occupation, their middle classes harnessed the discourse of morality as a liberatory paradigm for strengthening the nation and curing it of its social ills. Morality was the basis of a politics of emancipation that became increasingly urgent in the wake of the war's unprecedented destruction.

Yet the emancipatory politics of moral regeneration was simultaneously a class politics that reinforced the hegemony of the middle class and the necessity of its rule. Whereas concerns about morality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on the effect that

¹¹ Although this study recognizes that the prohibition movement had a long history prior to its legal implementation, it also argues that the movement was able to succeed only in the context of postwar anxieties. See *The Prohibition Question Viewed from the Economic and Moral Standpoint* (Baltimore: Manufacturers Record Publishing Co, 1922). For this reason, it shares similarities with the other anti-vice campaigns that developed in the early interwar period. For anti-vice campaigns in colonized countries in the early interwar period, see Stephen Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); See also Eva Plach, *The Clash of Moral Nations: Cultural Politics in Pilsudski's Poland, 1926-1935* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); See also Keeley Stauter-Halsted, "Moral Panic and the Prostitute in Partitioned Poland: Middle-Class Respectability in Defense of the Modern Nation," *Slavic Review* 68:3 (Fall 2009), 557 - 581; Una Crowley and Rob Kitchen, "Producing 'Decent Girls': Governmentality and the Moral Geographies of Sexual Conduct in Ireland (1922 - 1937)," *Gender, Place and Culture* 15:4 (August 2008), 355 - 372.

¹² See, for example, scholarship on Prohibition, such as John J. Rumbarger, *Profits, Power and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America 1800 - 1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), Gaines M. Foster, "A Broad Agenda of Moral Legislation," in *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865 - 1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); See also Hafez, "The Lazy, the Idle, the Industrious." Although concerns about morality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century focused on the productivity of workers, the morality discourse of the interwar period appeared more concerned with the growing power of those who profited from 'immoral' activities.

‘immoral’ activities had on the productivity of workers, many of the moral regeneration campaigns waged by the middle class in the interwar period were rooted in a deep-seated anxiety about the proliferation of subaltern spaces and the growing sociopolitical power of subaltern network formations, some of whom derived strength from the trade in commercial sex, drugs and alcohol.¹³ Some anti-vice activists were particularly concerned about the role that subaltern networks played in elite politics and trade, which suggests that morality discourses were integral to the political struggles waged by the middle class for control of the state and economy.¹⁴ As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, the growth of subaltern networks in response to wartime economic challenges was perceived as a direct threat to the political power of the middle class. In response, middle class nationalists during the early interwar period harnessed new state technologies of propaganda and surveillance to implement a moral order grounded in middle-class values, one which legitimized the political power of the middle class and criminalized subaltern economic strategies that had become increasingly widespread in the wake of wartime inflation. The politicization of morality was thus integral to the political and economic struggles of middle class nationalists in the interwar period.

The anti-vice campaigns that gained strength and legitimacy after the war were also rooted in middle-class concerns about the preservation of the family. As mentioned in Chapter 2, British colonial officials in early interwar Egypt considered the family the foundation of state power.¹⁵ Although Pollard has shown that the centrality of bourgeois family values to both

¹³ See McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 7 - 8.

¹⁴ See Ernest Hurst Cherrington, *History of the Anti-Saloon League* (Westerville, Ohio: The American Issue Publishing Company, 1913), 7 - 8.

¹⁵ See McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 7.

British colonial and Egyptian nationalist discourse predated the war,¹⁶ the strength of the family as an institution became increasingly important after the war in many countries around the world. The way in which the war had separated millions of men from their wives and children sparked anxieties about the breakdown of the family, and the gendered and sexual behavior of women in particular was seen as central to its survival. The early interwar period was thus characterized by a greater emphasis on the role of women as wives and mothers and the importance of relegating women to the domestic realm.¹⁷ This was accompanied by discussions in the press denouncing the increased visibility of women dressing and behaving ‘inappropriately’ in public space,¹⁸ as well as discussions about women's proper behavior in the home.¹⁹ As the institution of the family became the object of greater political concern in the interwar period, women's actions in both public and private became increasingly politicized.

The reaction of the Egyptian middle class to the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case and its female accomplices, Raya and Sakina, should thus be seen as a moral panic that reflected broader middle-class concerns after the war rather than a uniquely Egyptian nationalist discourse rooted in Islamic precepts. Concerns about the spread of vice, the breakdown of the family, the gender and sexual behavior of women, and the fluid boundary between subalterns and the middle

¹⁶ Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*.

¹⁷ Although Egyptian nationalists attributed the emphasis on female domesticity to Islamic tradition, historians have noted a similar trend in Britain after the war. This suggests that the trend had more to do with post-WWI reconstruction than allegedly Islamic traditions. See Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ The discourse on the gendered and sexual behavior of women in public was simultaneously a classed discourse, as the women who were the objects of the middle class gaze in public spaces were usually working class women. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁹ Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, Chapter 3.

class were integral to the anti-vice campaigns that gained strength after the war. The media discourse about Raya and Sakina reflects the way in which these middle-class concerns were central to both nationalist and colonial concerns, thereby challenging the historiographical divide between Egypt's colonial period and its liberal nationalist era.

Prostitution, Female Sociability, and the Breakdown of the Family

The media reports about the case focused on the involvement of both the suspects and the murder victims in Alexandria's sex trade, and the case became the starting point for an anti-vice campaign directed against prostitution. Opinion pieces published during the investigation blamed the murders on the spread of prostitution under colonial rule, attributing the spread to the colonial state's licensing of prostitution. In an article published in *al-Umma* on November 23, 1920, Muḥammad al-Hayyāwī called for an end to the state licensing system, arguing that Britain did not even license prostitution in its own country.²⁰ Yet Egyptian nationalists were not alone in their condemnation of prostitution at this time. As discussed in Chapter 2, some colonial officials in Egypt such as A.C. McBarnet also voiced opposition to prostitution in the early interwar period on the grounds that it posed a threat to the strength and stability of the state, arguing that prostitution was 'quasi-criminal.'²¹ The notion that the power of the state and/or nation rested on the unit of the family (whether monogamous or polygamous) was a common assumption in both colonial and nationalist discourse, as was the assumption that prostitution posed a direct threat to

²⁰ "Hayya Waḥshayya wi Humma Wuḥūsh: Wi Lākin Min Sharīka'uhum wi Ma Huwwa al-Dawā' [She's a Barbarian and So Are They: But Who Are Their Partners and What's the Solution?]," *al-Umma*, November 23, 1920, 3.

²¹ McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 7.

the preservation of the family.²² The relationship between the Alexandria murders and the sex trade thus served as a platform for both colonial and nationalist debates about prostitution and its role in the breakdown of families.

Although concerns about the family had always been central to Egyptian nationalist discourse, prostitution did not figure prominently in nationalist debates prior to the interwar period. In his study of prostitution in the mid-nineteenth century, Khaled Fahmy argues that state discourse about prostitution was guided by concerns about public health, and that complaints from neighbors expressed concerns about the ‘evil’ nature of prostitutes and the potential threat they posed to public security rather than the immorality of their behavior.²³ In the late nineteenth century, articles about prostitution in the Egyptian press were primarily concerned with the effectiveness of the regulation system in preventing the spread of venereal disease rather than debating the morality or immorality of the act.²⁴ At the turn of the century, nationalist writers began to critique the prevalence of ‘vice’ among the poor, primarily drugs, alcohol and prostitution.²⁵ However, they associated these activities with the laziness and lack of self-discipline that characterized the poor and did not envision the activities as a threat to the other members of the nation. The moral panic sparked by the Alexandria murders about the issue of

²² It is important to note that although feminists lobbied for the abolition of polygamy, this practice did not figure prominently in interwar discussions about the preservation of the family. Judge McBarnet argued that state power depended on the preservation of the family, whether it be monogamous or polygamous. See McBarnet, *Draft of a Series of Laws*, 6. Kholoussy also notes that polygamy was not perceived as a threat to the family and did not figure prominently in nationalist discourse about the marriage crisis. Thus, the attack on prostitution does not appear to be related to a desire to promote monogamy. See Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, 83.

²³ Fahmy, “Prostitution in Egypt in the Nineteenth Century,” 90.

²⁴ “A Letter from Tanta,” *al-Mu’ayyid*, December 26, 1890. Article accessed in Egyptian National Archives, Interior Ministry Files, “Question des Filles Publiques.”

²⁵ Lockman, “Imagining the Working Class,” 166.

prostitution thus appears to be a new historical development in interwar Egypt, one which was due not to the nature of the murder case itself but rather to the gender and sexual politics of middle-class formation.

In light of the fact that the records of the 1920 Alexandria murder case indicate that many of the men and women involved in the sex trade were married and that some of them chose to engage in prostitution in order to keep their families together, the notion that prostitution resulted in the destruction rather than preservation of families does not reflect the lived realities of many subalterns in wartime Alexandria. The juxtaposition of prostitution and the family in the interwar period appears to reflect new middle-class anxieties and assumptions about the marital habits of men and women. Although Hanan Kholoussy argues that the discourse about the marriage crisis was not limited to concerns about sexuality, both she and Bruce Dunne note that a number of nationalist writers attributed men's decision to delay marriage to the availability of premarital sex with prostitutes, making prostitution a direct threat to the institution of marriage and the family.²⁶ According to this logic, men had to be deprived of premarital sex in order to encourage them to marry and preserve the institution of the family. These assumptions ascribed greater agency to sexuality in explanations of human behavior, a trend which also characterized the discourse of European psychology and criminology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁷ The prostitute was seen as a threat to the family primarily because of the effect that her sexuality had on men's marital decisions, and this effect was predicated on the understanding

²⁶ Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, 2 and 9.

²⁷ See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*. See also Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York and Washington: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., 1920); See also Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, trans. Nicole Hahn Rafter and Mary Gibson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

that men's behavior was shaped by sexual desire. The sexualization of women was thus integrally tied to the sexualization of men.

The discourse about Egypt's perceived marriage crisis and its condemnation of prostitution suggests that the sexual boundaries of the middle class were integral to its material boundaries. Policing the sexual behavior of middle class men was simultaneously a means of policing their financial behavior. Kholoussy notes that Egyptian nationalists criticized bachelors for squandering their time and money on prostitution and alcohol rather than investing it into marriage and family.²⁸ Fears about the downward flow of capital were thus central to the discourse about the immorality of prostitution. As discussed in Chapter 2, brothels in al-Labbān were spaces where men and women of various social classes intermingled, which contributed to the fluidity of class boundaries both socially and economically. The discourse about Egypt's marriage crisis thus tied the preservation of the family to the preservation of class boundaries and middle class wealth, indicating that economic concerns played an important and understudied role in anti-vice campaigns against prostitution. Concerns about morality and the sexual behavior of middle class men and women were central to the political economy of the middle class.

The absence of discussions about the trafficking of impoverished women in media reports about the murder case further suggests that the condemnation of prostitution was integrally related to the construction of the middle-class family. As discussed in Chapter 2, the investigation records of the Alexandria serial murder case reveal that both the Tanta and the Alexandria murders were committed by trafficking networks who sold impoverished young women and teenage girls to brothels. Yet these details were ignored in media discussions about

²⁸ Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, 9.

the murder case and the sex trade. What caught the attention of the media was the fact that 'respectable' women were entering illicit spaces in Alexandria, and that Raya and Sakina were involved in "luring" them. It is for this reason that the media paid more attention to the Alexandria serial murder case than to the Tanta murder case, because while the Tanta murder victims were primarily high-profile sex workers, the majority of the Alexandria murder victims who had been reported to the police were petite bourgeois women.²⁹ The primary concern in the media discourse about the case was thus the corruption of 'respectable' women rather than the sex trade itself.

Alexandria's cosmopolitan landscape played an important role in the media panic over the corruption of 'respectable' women. As discussed in Chapter 1, this cosmopolitanism was characterized by the fluidity of boundaries not only between different ethnic communities, but also between different social classes. Female sociability in this cosmopolitan setting was of particular concern to Egyptian nationalists. Opinion articles about the serial murder case in the Egyptian press frequently targeted female sociability as one of the primary causes of the murders. For example, an Alexandrian newspaper called *Wādī al-Nīl* published an article condemning, among other things, the prevalence of women socializing in the street and in cafes.³⁰ Excessive sociability among women was perceived as the reason 'respectable' women entered into illicit spaces. A number of Egyptian newspapers thus blamed the murder victims for going to the brothels rather than blaming the male perpetrators who killed them.³¹ For Egyptian

²⁹ According to Bimbashi McPherson, one of the Tanta murder victims was a powerful and high-profile sex worker by the name of Fardūs. See Barry Carman and John McPherson, ed. *Bimbashi McPherson: A Life in Egypt* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1983), 215.

³⁰ "Ba'd al-Jarā'im al-Akhīra [After the Recent Crimes]," *Wādī al-Nīl*, November 25, 1920, 2.

³¹ See Lopez, "Madams, Murders, and the Media," 384 - 385.

nationalists, the problem was thus not simply prostitution but also the social fluidity that enabled it to spread.

The concerns over female sociability were closely related to concerns over the presence of women in public space. Despite the fact that many of the murder victims were widowed or divorced, opinion pieces about the murder case argued that women should not be in public space without a man to protect them.³² These articles called on men to keep their women at home and shelter them. Women were presented as not only naive and helpless, but also untrustworthy and incapable of restraining themselves. In an article entitled "Some of Our Shortcomings," published in *al-Umma* on November 21, 1920, the author argued that one of the main social ailments that the murder case had shed light on was that Egyptian men did not have enough *ghīra* for their women.³³ The term *ghīra* refers to a strong feeling of jealousy and passion which continues to have a positive connotation in Egyptian society. *Ghīra* is what would drive men to seclude their wives and protect them from harm. *Ghīra* is what would lead men to keep their women out of public space. The solution to the spread of vice and crime was thus increased male control over female mobility and sociability.

In addition to blaming men for their lack of control over women, discussions about the murder case in the Egyptian media also argued that women themselves were in need of reform. They needed to cultivate their chastity and exercise greater self-restraint.³⁴ They needed to be educated, disciplined, and modernized in order to learn how to be proper wives. Male control

³² Lopez, "Media Sensations, Contested Sensibilities," PhD diss., 67.

³³ "Ba'ḍ 'Uyūbna [Some of Our Shortcomings]," *al-Umma*, November 21, 1920, 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

over women was insufficient to recreate women as proper national subjects. Women had to be taught how to govern themselves in order to prevent them from entering into illicit spaces. The media discourse about the serial murder case thus popularized Egyptian middle-class nationalist views of gender and sexuality as key modes of governmentality. The next section will examine the gender and sexual performances that became central to the construction of middle-class femininity in the wake of the murder investigation.

Gendering and Modernizing Egyptian Women

The primary focus of media discussions about women's proper gender and sexual performances were middle class women rather than the working poor. The proper woman was not a working woman, but rather a housewife who could be secluded in the home. The women that middle-class nationalists sought to reform were thus not subaltern women like Raya and Sakina, who were denounced by the media as barbaric and unreformable, but rather the 'respectable' women who had become their victims.³⁵ The key to preventing the spread of vice and the corruption of women became the creation of a class boundary that was simultaneously gendered and sexualized. The media discourse about the murder case thus marked the moment in which becoming a middle-class woman entailed controlling one's gender and sexual performances in both public and private.

In many ways, the media discourse about the murder case popularized an existing middle-class nationalist discourse about the backwardness of women and the way in which this backwardness had weakened the Egyptian nation. This discourse emerged in the early twentieth

³⁵ For discussions of media reports denouncing the sisters as barbaric, see Lopez, "Madams, Murders, and the Media," 389.

century and focused on the need to educate and ‘civilize’ women. The most well-known treatise on the subject of civilizing/emancipating women is Qasim Amin’s *The Liberation of Women*, published in 1899. Although Amin has traditionally been considered a feminist, his attempt to link women’s emancipation through education and social reform to national liberation reflects the same assumptions that guided nationalist condemnations of women’s backwardness as the cause of Egypt’s problems.³⁶ There is thus a strong discursive connection between *The Liberation of Women* and another article published that same year called “Hidden Agents in Society,” which blamed the nation’s weakness on women’s backwardness.³⁷ Both texts led to the same conclusion: women needed to be educated, civilized and made into modern subjects for the sake of national progress.

The discourse about the need to create a new Egyptian woman became increasingly popular after WWI. The nationalist struggle after the war was integrally tied to middle-class formation, and nationalists believed that proving their adherence to middle-class norms was the key to political and economic emancipation from British colonialism.³⁸ For this reason, editorials about the murder case frequently presented the serial murders as an embarrassment to the nation, not because of their brutality but rather because of the light they shed on the sexual practices of ‘respectable’ women.³⁹ Governing the gender and sexual performances of women thus became central to the achievement of national liberation.

³⁶ For further critiques of Qasim Amin, see Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

³⁷ See Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 82.

³⁸ Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation*.

³⁹ "Hayya Waḥshayya wi Humma Wuḥūsh," *al-Umma*.

Raya and Sakina thus entered the media at a moment when Egyptian nationalists were already in the process of discursively creating the new Egyptian woman. In January 1920, a new newspaper was founded called, *al-Mar'a al-Miṣriyya* [*The Egyptian Woman*], whose contributors were mostly men. The newspaper focused on the duties of wives to their families, issues of morality, the upbringing of children, and other topics that related to the goal of “elevating the condition of women.”⁴⁰ The molding of proper Egyptian women had become an increased priority for nationalists in the early interwar period, particularly in light of new concerns over a perceived marriage crisis in which middle-class Egyptian men were ostensibly delaying marriage for a number of reasons, including the inability to find suitable wives.⁴¹ However, as mentioned above, this development was not unique to Egypt, for interwar gender politics in many parts of the world were characterized by a renewed emphasis on female domesticity and recreating women as proper wives and mothers. The historical moment at which Raya and Sakina entered the limelight was thus not only turning point in Egyptian nationalist politics but also a global turning point in the spread of middle-class modernity.

In the years following the 1920 Alexandria murder trial, the discursive formation of middle-class women was marked by escalating concerns over their modernity, and newspapers continued to popularize concerns about the backwardness of Egyptian women and the need to civilize them. Some weekly newspapers, such as *Safīnat al-Akḥbār* in Tanta, appeared to be dedicated entirely to this goal, dedicating their front pages to the condemnation of barbaric

⁴⁰ *Al-Mar'a al-Miṣriyya*, January 1920, 3. For further discussion of the new Egyptian woman, see Mona L. Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863 - 1922* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 79 - 95.

⁴¹ Hanan Kholoussy notes that according to her research, the first use of the term “marriage crisis” was in the February 1920 edition of *al-Mar'a al-Miṣriyya*. See Kholoussy, *For Better; For Worse*, 132.

beliefs and practices among Egyptian women. The most frequently cited concerns in newspapers of the early 1920s were the *zār*; a ritual of exorcism, and the *dhikr*; a Sufi ritual of recitation.⁴² Although the two rituals served completely different purposes, middle-class Egyptians lumped the two together as backward practices. During the investigation of the murder case, *Wādī al-Nīl* had condemned the practice of *dhikr*, noting that none of Raya’s neighbors could hear the murders due to all the noise that her Nubian neighbors made during their Sufi rituals.⁴³ Yet unlike the *dhikr*, Egyptian newspapers explicitly linked the *zār* to Egyptian women, arguing that the practice had increased in recent years and had reached a height of absurdity and danger. *Safīnat al-Akhhbār* published articles about the *zār* entitled, “The Barbarity of Wives,” and the newspaper *Alexandria* named it “The Social Disease.”⁴⁴ Women were also blamed for wasting their time and money on other superstitious practices such as fortunetelling, which was cited as one of the main methods that Raya and Sakina had used to lure women into their homes.⁴⁵ These condemnations suggest that Egyptian modernity was predicated on the standardization of religious practices and beliefs, making spiritual attempts to cure disease through rituals such as the *zār* socially unacceptable. It also suggests that although ‘superstition’ was common among both men and women, it became exclusively associated with deviant femininity in the interwar period.

⁴² See Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, 100. Mitchell mentions two nationalist works in the early twentieth century which also condemned these practices. The concerns about *dhikr* and *zār* were thus not new to the interwar period but rather popularized by the increased focus on modernizing women.

⁴³ “Silsilat al-Jarā’im fī Buyūt al-Hilāk,” *Wādī al-Nīl*, December 2, 1920, 3.

⁴⁴ “Waḥshayyat al-Zawjāt [The Barbarity of Wives],” *Safīnat al-Akhhbār*, September 9, 1921, 1; “Al-Marraḍ al-Ijtīmā’ī [The Social Disease],” *al-Iskandirayya*, December 28, 1924, 4.

⁴⁵ “Silsilat al-Jarā’im fī Buyūt al-Hilāk,” *Wādī al-Nīl*, December 9, 1920, 3.

In addition to disabusing women of their superstitious beliefs, the making of middle-class modernity in interwar Egypt was predicated on a new gendering of women along the lines of a bourgeois cult of domesticity. Strength - particularly physical strength - became the exclusive prerogative of Egyptian men, and this was both visually and discursively mapped onto women's bodies in the interwar period. Prior to the 1920 Alexandria murder case, the image of the strong Egyptian woman was glorified in Egyptian literature and media. In 1909, the feminist Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah argued before the nationalist Umma Party that upper class women needed to work like their agrarian sisters in order to strengthen their bodies and improve their health.⁴⁶ This glorification of the strong female body was mirrored in popular photographs of the 1919 Revolution which depicted women at the forefront of nationalist demonstrations. In the years following the 1920 Alexandria murder trial, female strength was visualized in the popular press as a sign of degeneracy and a threat to the Egyptian nation. Satirical cartoons glorified and feminized the thin, frail female figure while simultaneously demonizing and masculinizing the strong female body.⁴⁷ These cartoons presented masculinity and femininity as an inverse relationship, with the masculinization of one half resulting in the feminization of the other half. Aggressive female figures were thus depicted as emasculating forces that weakened men, and the strength that was once glorified in Egyptian women had suddenly become a menace to society.

The new gendering of Egyptian women in satirical cartoons mirrored a transformation in images of the female body in both political imagery and advertisements. In her study of political cartoons in which Egypt was represented as a woman, Beth Baron notes that the once popular

⁴⁶ Bāḥithat al-Bādiyah (Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif), "A Lecture in the Club of the Umma Party (1909)," in *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writings*, eds. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (London: Virago Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ See satirical cartoons in Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse*, 41 and 66; and Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 174.

depiction of Egypt as a strong, agrarian, dark-skinned woman faded from the popular press in the 1920s and was replaced by the image of the sexualized, urban, fair-skinned woman.⁴⁸ A closer look at Egyptian newspapers reveals that the female image which appears in the political cartoons studied by Baron is strikingly similar to the female image that appears in advertisements.



Figure 4.2: Cigarette Advertisement in *al-Kashkūl*, No. 198, February 17, 1925, page 18

⁴⁸ Beth Baron, “Nationalist Iconography: Egypt as a Woman,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

This gendered and classed image of Egyptian women in popular media during the interwar period closely resembles contemporaneous images of women in advertisements around the world.⁴⁹ In the 1920s, the bourgeois woman became a modern ideal, and the image of the female body was feminized, sexualized, classed and racialized in unprecedented ways. The female consumer displaced the peasant woman as the symbol of the Egyptian nation, frailty displaced strength as feminine virtue, and urban Islam displaced rural spirituality in the claim to authenticity. Modernity became the hallmark of the middle class, and Raya and Sakina became its casualties.

The Trial of the Unreformables

As discussed in Chapter 3, the investigation of the murders continued for nearly three months due to the conflicting testimonies of the suspects. By January 1921, despite the fact that the investigation was far from reaching a satisfactory conclusion, media coverage of the case began to wane. In February 1921, the state decided to prosecute ten of the suspects, and there was no further news of the case until the trial three months later. Shortly before the first session of the trial on May 10, 1921, the government handed out tickets to attendees, and only those who had managed to get a ticket were permitted to enter the courtroom to see the trial.⁵⁰ For one week, the Alexandria criminal courtroom was transformed into the theatrical stage of the most memorable nationalist performance in twentieth-century Egypt. Newspapers that had played an active role during the investigation in denouncing Raya and Sakina as symbols of women's backwardness

⁴⁹ See Alys Eve Weinbaum et al., eds. *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ "Qadayyat Qatl al-Nisā' [The Case of the Murder of Women]," *Wādī al-Nīl*, May 11, 1921, 3.

further dramatized the case by renaming it, “The Trial of Raya and Sakina.”⁵¹ Despite the fact that the state was prosecuting the sisters as accomplices to four male perpetrators, the media continued to put them in the limelight, thereby normalizing the violence of the male suspects.

From the outset of the trial, the state prosecutor called for the execution of seven suspects as perpetrators of the crime: Raya, Sakina, their ex-husbands Ḥasab Allah Sa‘īd and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, Sakina's former lover, Salāma Muḥammad al-Kabt, and two *fitiwwa*, ‘Urābī Hassān and ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf. He also called for life imprisonment for two suspects as accomplices, Amīna bint Mansūr and her husband Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Qaddūs, and a prison sentence for the gold dealer who had bought the jewelry of the victims after their murder. Although Raya and Sakina’s testimonies were highly contested, with all of the other suspects at the trial denying involvement in the murders, the judges decided that there was enough evidence to convict Ḥasab Allah, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, ‘Urābī, and ‘Abd al-Rāziq and as perpetrators, and Raya and Sakina as their accomplices. The gold dealer was given a 5-year prison sentence, and the other three suspects were completely exonerated. Raya, Sakina and the four male perpetrators all received the death penalty, making Raya and Sakina the first women in Egypt to be executed, despite the fact that they were only accomplices.

Although the decision to execute two female accomplices is surprising from a historical perspective, the decision was sanctioned by the 1920 Egyptian Penal Code. Article 84 of the code states, “Except in cases where the law specifically provides otherwise, an accessory to an

⁵¹ “Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina [The Trial of Raya and Sakina],” *al-Ahrām*, May 11 - 17, 1921, 3; “Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina [The Trial of Raya and Sakina],” *al-Baṣīr*, May 11 - 12, 1921, 2. Under the title “The Trial of Raya and Sakina,” *al-Baṣīr* wrote in small letters “and their partners.”

offence will incur the penalty prescribed by law for the offence.”⁵² Since the judges granted the death penalty to the four principals, they were thus required by law to grant the same penalty to the accomplices. However, Article 43 of the same code states, “Whenever a person is convicted of an offence punished with death, the Court may, if it is of opinion that the circumstances of the case are of such a nature as to merit leniency, substitute for the death penalty that of penal servitude for life or for a term, and shall in the judgement state the reasons why sentence of death was not passed. Where the person convicted has not completed his twentieth year or where he is convicted as accessory only to any offence punished with death, the Court may, subject to the same conditions, further reduce the penalty to that of imprisonment.”⁵³ Article 43 makes it clear that the judges could have reduced Raya and Sakina’s sentence to imprisonment had they deemed it appropriate. According to the Egyptian press at this time, no women had ever received the death penalty in Egypt prior to 1921, which suggests that there was significant legal precedent to reduce Raya and Sakina’s sentence. The fact that the judges chose not to reduce the penalty represents a significant historical disjuncture that merits further exploration.

The attempts made by middle class nationalists to showcase Raya and Sakina as symbols of the backwardness of Egyptian women and the dangers of prostitution undoubtedly played a role in shaping the opinions of judges and lawyers. According to the Alexandria-based newspaper *al-Baṣīr*, the state prosecutor argued that no female criminal had ever received the death penalty in Egypt because they were all victims of circumstance who merited sympathy. Yet Raya and Sakina had participated in these recent murders “for other reasons” and thus deserved

⁵² Egypt, *Draft Penal Code*, 16. Since there was no distinction between an accomplice and an accessory in Egyptian criminal law at this time, the two terms will be used interchangeably in this chapter.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9

no mercy.⁵⁴ That the state prosecutor failed to clarify what Raya and Sakina's motives were suggests that this detail was perceived as superfluous in light of the popular understanding of the two women as savage beasts who corrupted and devoured respectable women. Raya and Sakina's alleged barbarity and their crossing of class boundaries was sufficient to explain their participation in the murders and to warrant the death penalty; the representations of the women in the media were considered ample proof that they deserved no mercy. As shown in Chapter 3, although the sisters' testimonies had indicated that they were also victims of circumstance, such evidence was inadmissible in the context of the nationalist condemnations of the two women.

To further substantiate the call to execute Raya and Sakina, *al-Baṣīr* noted that the state prosecutor claimed to have overheard Sakina say that if she received life imprisonment, she would likely get out in fifteen or twenty years and would then return to "roaming the streets of the city." For this reason, the state prosecutor asked the court to "sever these two corrupt members from the nation."⁵⁵ Although the journalist did not explain what was meant by "roaming the streets," the Arabic word used in this context, *saraha*, was the same word used to describe the activities of street peddlers and streetwalkers in the investigation records. As discussed in Chapter 3, given that Sakina was a streetwalker, this statement suggests that what the state prosecutor (or journalist) feared was not that Sakina would murder again, but rather that she would return to a particular form of sex work, one which was predicated on overtly public displays of sexuality. Raya and Sakina's involvement in the sex trade at a moment when

⁵⁴ "Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina," *al-Baṣīr*; May 11, 1921, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

nationalists were waging a campaign against prostitution was thus one of the primary reasons why they were deemed ungovernable.

The state reports written about prostitution in Egypt at this time suggest that Raya and Sakina's involvement in the sex trade was as disconcerting for colonial officials as it was for Egyptian nationalists. This is especially pertinent in light of the fact that one of the judges who presided over the trial was a colonial official. As previously mentioned, Judge McBarnet's 1919 report denounced prostitution as 'quasi-criminal,' focusing in particular on the danger posed by those who sought to profit from the sex trade. People who lived off the proceeds of prostitution such as Raya and Sakina were seen as far more threatening than the women who worked for them because it was the profitability of the sex trade rather than the existence of sex workers which concerned state officials. This is evidenced by the fact that throughout the 1920s and 30s, the League of Nations led a campaign to criminalize those who lived off the proceeds of prostitution, eventually achieving this goal in the mid-1930s.⁵⁶ As madams, Raya and Sakina were thus engaged in an occupation that many states actively sought to eradicate long before it was officially criminalized.

Other newspapers such as *al-Ahālī* reported that the state prosecutor called for the execution of Raya and Sakina on the grounds that the law made no distinction between men and women with regards to punishment.⁵⁷ The notion that men and women were equal in the eyes of the criminal justice system was presented in newspapers as a radical departure from legal

⁵⁶ "Souteneurs, 1930 - 1936," *The Women's Library*.

⁵⁷ "Maḥākimat 'Usbat al-Saffāḥīn [The Trial of the Serial Killer Gang]," *al-Ahālī*, May 12, 1921, 3.

proceedings in the past which had granted gentler punishments to women.⁵⁸ Whether or not this perceived rupture reflected historical reality is beside the point. The fact that Egyptian nationalists saw themselves entering a new era in which men and women were equal in their subjection to the nation-state and its laws meant that the case marked the beginning of a new order in Egypt, one which was predicated on the inclusion of women into the national polity.⁵⁹ Punishing Raya and Sakina as harshly as their male counterparts was a key component of nation-state formation because it extended the disciplinary power of the state to women as well as men.⁶⁰

Yet the process of national inclusion was also marked by a process of exclusion. While the media discourse about the murder case marked an attempt to include middle-class women as national subjects, subaltern women like Raya and Sakina were to be excluded from the national polity. The discourse about legal equality that emerged around the murder trial thus meant that subaltern women had to be treated equally to men in their criminalization and exclusion from the nation. That both nationalists and colonial officials were only interested in protecting middle-class women is further evidenced by which accomplices the judges decided to execute. Although corpses were found underneath the homes of Raya, Sakina and Amīna, only Raya and Sakina received the death penalty because they had allegedly "lured" respectable women into their

⁵⁸ "Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina," *al-Ahrām*, May 11, 1921, 3.

⁵⁹ Afaf Marsot discusses this historical era as Egypt's 'liberal experiment,' although she does not discuss its gendered dimensions. See Afaf Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment, 1922 - 1936* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

⁶⁰ Although Egyptian popular memory presents Raya and Sakina as the first Egyptian women to receive the death penalty, they also appear to be the only women in modern Egypt to ever receive the death penalty. This suggests that their execution reflects what Foucault describes as the shift from sovereign power to disciplinary power. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. Yet the fact that Raya and Sakina's execution is embedded in contemporary popular memory indicates that behind all disciplinary power is the threat of sovereign power. Disciplinary power can never be fully normalized, and thus the memory of sovereign power must continually be invoked.

homes. Despite the fact that Amīna was clearly involved in a trafficking network and had sold at least two teenage girls to other brothels, she was exonerated at trial. The trafficking of impoverished women in this case was thus ignored by both the colonial state and Egyptian nationalists, while the corruption of middle-class women sparked a public outcry. Protection and rights were granted only to those women who met classed standards for respectability, thus making this murder case central to the discursive formation of the Egyptian middle class.

Spatializing Class Relations

In addition to highlighting the role of gender and sexuality in middle-class formation, the media discourse about the serial murder case emphasized the responsibility of the state in maintaining safety and security. Egyptian nationalists used the string of murders to critique the colonial state for its failure to protect the nation. After the media began reporting the discovery of the corpses, Fikrī Abāza published an editorial in *al-Ahrām* saying, "Where are the police? Where is the sword of government that should fall on the necks of bloodthirsty criminals? Where is the vigilant eye of justice that should never sleep? Where is the mighty hand of authority? Evidently, the government has been too busy training its army of secret political police to bother with the regular forces necessary to safeguard our personal safety."⁶¹ Other editorials echoed his concerns. In *al-Umma*, Muḥammad al-Hayyāwī accused the colonial state of protecting criminals and granting them impunity, and in *Wādī al-Nīl*, an anonymous writer argued that the case proved that Egyptians were living under a failed regime.⁶² Middle-class nationalists pointed to the

⁶¹ Yunan Labib Rizk, "The Prince of Wit," *al-Ahrām: A Diwan of Contemporary Life* (316), accessed June 29, 2016, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/1999/460/chrncls.htm>.

⁶² "Hayya Waḥshayya wi Humma Wuḥūsh," *al-Umma*; "Ba'd al-Jarā'im al-Akhīra," *Wādī al-Nīl*.

colonial state's failure to provide safety and security in this serial murder case to bolster their calls for national independence.

Fears about safety were also accompanied by fears about subaltern deception. The murder case showed that subalterns who profited from illicit activities had little difficulty passing as middle class and fooling strangers. According to Sakina's testimony, one of the reasons Ḥasab Allah had decided to rape and murder Fāṭima the servant broker was because her husband, Ramaḍān al-Naggār, had publicly confronted Ḥasab Allah to ask him why he acted so arrogantly towards his neighbors when he and his wife were nothing but pimps.⁶³ After the murders began, Ḥasab Allah had begun to dress like a middle-class man, wearing expensive clothes, fancy shoes, a ṭarbūsh and gold jewelry, and those who did not know him thought he was an effendi. His ability to pass as middle class offended his petite bourgeois neighbors, who attempted to publicly expose his fraud. Middle-class formation thus entailed the active policing of class boundaries to prevent others from passing as middle class and fooling the rest of society.⁶⁴ This policing was facilitated by the construction of middle-class spaces in Alexandria, which limited the ability of subalterns to pass into respectable society.

In response to escalating concerns about crime and deception, the Alexandria Municipality adopted a new town-planning scheme in June 1921 to spatialize class relations and harden the porous boundary of the middle class. The Engineer-in-Chief of the Alexandria Municipality, W.H. McLean, had begun drafting the plan in October 1919, but its implementation became increasingly urgent in the wake of the murder trial. The preface to the town-planning

⁶³ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 203 - 204.

⁶⁴ Jacob discusses a similar case of a *fitiwwa* who had "acquired the competence to pass in respectable society." See Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*, 239.

scheme framed the proliferation of cramped and poorly visible subaltern spaces as a threat to safety and public health, and the solution proposed was the creation of new middle-class spaces throughout Alexandria in the form of parks, gardens, stadiums, and suburban housing.⁶⁵ These middle-class spaces mapped new propertied relations onto the urban landscape and served to harden the fluid spatial boundary between workers and the petite bourgeoisie, who had been living side by side in Alexandria. The town-planning scheme revealed that the formation of new propertied relations was a contested process of boundary making that brought to light the fragility of the middle class. The survival of this newly expanding class after WWI was largely dependent on the state because the protection of its wealth necessitated the hardening of spatial, discursive and material boundaries in ways that only the state could enforce. Middle-class formation was thus the product not only of economic structural changes and discursive practices, but also spatial interventions undertaken by the state to solidify new class boundaries.

To harden spatial boundaries between the middle class and subalterns, the Alexandria town-planning scheme of 1921 proposed the expansion of suburbs to accommodate a middle-class flight from the city center. The plan proposed a new suburb in the ‘Agamī district and the expansion of an existing suburb in Ramleh.⁶⁶ In addition, it proposed the construction of several new roads to connect these suburbs to the city center. Some of these roads were designed to run through *hishash*, which were shantytowns that had proliferated during the war.⁶⁷ The municipality had become increasingly concerned about *hishash* after the war, and it frequently

⁶⁵ W.H. McLean, *City of Alexandria Town Planning Scheme*, 3 - 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

discussed this problem at its monthly meetings.⁶⁸ Therefore, in addition to destroying the *hishash* that stood in the way of the new roads, the town-planning scheme called for the destruction of all *hishash* throughout Alexandria.⁶⁹ The municipality planned to replace them with new homes, although the town-planning scheme did not clarify how the poor would afford these new homes. Remaking Alexandria as a middle-class city thus entailed the reconfiguration of subaltern spaces in ways that left the poor increasingly vulnerable.

The town-planning scheme also attempted to create new leisure spaces for the middle class, including a sporting club, a racecourse, and numerous parks and gardens all over the city.⁷⁰ The creation of new spaces for sporting events and family outings reflected a desire to solidify class boundaries by pulling the middle class away from the shared spaces of outdoor marketplaces, bars and coffee shops, where various social classes intermingled. These new middle-class venues promoted public gatherings rather than private ones, thus increasing the visibility of the middle class. The emphasis on public sociability also served to pull the middle class away from private entertainment venues that might harbor illicit activities. The spatial reconfiguration of middle-class desires through the popularization of leisure that did not involve sex, drugs and alcohol played an important role in middle-class formation.

The 1921 town planning scheme was predicated on a new conception of governmentality which was as important to the middle class as the solidification of class boundaries. This new disciplinary mechanism entailed not only the creation of new middle-class spaces, but also the

⁶⁸ Ville D'Alexandrie, Séance de la Commission Municipale du 7 Juillet 1920, 6 - 19, Maṭbū'āt Section of Egyptian National Archives.

⁶⁹ W.H. McLean, *City of Alexandria Town Planning Scheme*, 8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 - 4.

restructuring of subaltern space to increase visibility and surveillance. The preface to the town planning scheme noted that the rapid growth of the city without government interference had led to a chaotic urban landscape of town quarters with “no squares, no open spaces, just small, mean unlevelled tortuous streets.”⁷¹ The author noted that the problem was particularly bad in Alexandria and Tanta - the two sites of the most recent serial murders - and that the situation posed a danger to the well-being of their inhabitants. The plan thus proposed the creation of open public spaces not only for the middle class, but also for subalterns, including large squares at the intersection of major streets to make intersections more visible. The plan also proposed widening and straightening streets in low-income neighborhoods, in addition to tearing down shantytowns and building new homes to replace them.⁷² The municipality had decided to change the nature of subaltern living, as effective governance was predicated on the visibility of the governed. Restructuring the city was necessary not only to spatialize class divisions, but also to make subaltern spaces more transparent. Through McLean’s town planning scheme, the discourse about the 1920 Alexandria serial murder case was mapped onto the urban landscape.

As will be shown in the next chapter, the proliferation of hidden spaces in wartime Alexandria held great political significance. One of the areas that the town-planning scheme sought to reconstruct was the area around the Abū al-‘Abbās mosque in the Ras al-Tīn district of Alexandria, which had served as the starting point of multiple subaltern uprisings in the early interwar period.⁷³ These uprisings were organized by subaltern networks that had formed in

⁷¹ Ibid., 1.

⁷² Ibid., 4 and 8.

⁷³ Ibid., 4.

response to the effects of wartime colonial exploitation and economic restructuring. The next chapter will examine these uprisings in the context of the final words of the alleged perpetrators of the serial murders, highlighting the way in which the growing informalization of labor and the subalternization of workers during this period led to both the uprisings and the serial murders.

Chapter 5

"I Fooled the Government of al-Labbān": Political Economy and Working-Class Resistance in Early Interwar Alexandria

al-Baṣīr, December 21, 1921:

"At 8:05, Sakina emerged from her prison cell with her hands shackled, accompanied by two prison guards. One of the guards told her, "Toughen up. Be strong." She responded to him in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear: "I'm a strong woman. If I can take on a hundred, I can take on a thousand." When her sentence was read to her, she said, "I murdered ... I murdered, but it's okay because I fooled 'the government of al-Labbān' before Beshara Effendi came to power..." Then, when she was taken to the dark room and transferred to the executioner and his assistant, she said, "This is the place where strong people stand. I'm a strong woman and I've done things that even men can't do."¹

al-Ahrām, December 22, 1921:

"She was energetic in both her movement and speech. When the commissioner read the death sentence to her stating that she had killed seventeen women, she responded, "Did I kill them with my own hands?" Then she started speaking and among her statements were the following: "Fine, I killed all those women and I fooled the al-Labbān police. I've been sentenced to death and I know I'm going to be hanged. But I don't care. I'm a strong woman and I can take it."²

¹ "Tanfīz Ḥikm al-A'dām fī Thalatha Min 'Usbat al-Saffāhīn [The Execution of the Death Sentence for Three of the Serial Killing Gang]," *al-Baṣīr*, December 21, 1921. The word I have translated as 'strong' is *gad'ā*, which also has the connotation of brave and clever.

² "Usābat Ightīāl al-Nisā' wi A'dāmuhum [The Gang of Women Killers and Their Execution]," *al-Ahrām*, December 22, 1921.

Sakina's final words at her execution were baffling. *Al-Ahrām* called her "one of the craziest and most courageous people to stand at the scaffold."³ The same woman who had been decried in the media as a licentious murderer a few months earlier was now being credited with bold statements laced with heroism. On one level, Sakina's dying words symbolized the new interwar condemnation of the strong Egyptian woman and the glorification of female vulnerability - a shift discussed at length in the previous chapter. Yet Sakina's statements spoke not only to a gendered shift but also to a shift in conceptions of sovereignty. This question of sovereignty had turned her life into a paradox. As shown in the previous chapter, Sakina had been reviled as a symbol of colonial corruption during the investigation and trial of the serial murders. Her very existence was touted as evidence that the colonial order had destroyed the moral fabric of Egyptian society. Yet at her execution, Sakina suddenly became a symbol of resistance to the colonial order. She became living proof of not only the colonial state's moral corruption, but also its ineffective governance. Through her success in evading and deceiving colonial authorities, she had proven that the colonial state could not provide safety or security for the native population. Her appearance on the scaffold thus served as a reminder that the very actions that had made her a villain had also made her a source of legitimacy for the Egyptian nationalist cause.

While Sakina's dying words symbolized the fading legitimacy of an old order, the variations on her statements in Egyptian newspapers raised questions about the precise nature of this order. *Al-Ahrām*, a newspaper published in the Egyptian capital of Cairo, quoted Sakina as

³ Ibid.

saying, "I fooled the al-Labbān police." Yet *al-Baṣīr*, a local Alexandrian newspaper, emphasized that Sakina had said, "I fooled 'the government of al-Labbān' [*ḥukūmat al-Labbān*]," placing additional quotation marks around 'the government of al-Labbān' to dispel any doubts about the accuracy of the puzzling quote. While the meaning of 'the government of al-Labbān' is never clarified or expounded upon in the *al-Baṣīr* article, this phrase emphasizes a conception of local sovereignty that is absent from *al-Ahrām*'s version of the statement. It suggests that the new nationalist order envisioned by the Egyptian middle-class was as much about the death of local sovereignties as it was about the overthrow of colonial rule. Sakina's famous last words thus symbolized not only the fading legitimacy of the colonial order, but also the fading legitimacy of Alexandrian conceptions of communal sovereignty.

The discrepancy between the statements that appear in *al-Ahrām* and *al-Baṣīr* raises questions about the accuracy of the media reports. Since the executions of Raya and Sakina took place inside the women's prison, it is possible that journalists were not allowed to attend. Yet state reports about the executions reveal similar sentiments. According to the medical report filed by the Prison's Department of the Ministry of Interior, Sakina's dying words were, "I'm a strong woman [*gad'a*] and I'm going to be hanged at the place where strong people stand. I killed seventeen women and I fooled the government."⁴ Although the various versions of Sakina's statement were mediated by the interests and assumptions of the state and middle-class nationalists, they all suggest that Sakina presented her involvement in the murders as an act of resistance to state power and a symbol of strength and bravery. This appears to stand in stark contrast to Sakina's testimony before the state prosecutor, in which she stated that her

⁴ See "Medical Report on Prisoners Executed," in 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 361.

involvement in the murders was coerced because the men who had killed the women had threatened to kill her as well if she spoke about the murders.⁵ Her sister, Raya, also told the state prosecutor that she had learned about the murders only after the men had begun their killing spree, and that they beat her whenever she protested.⁶ Sakina's dying words were all the more surprising in light of these prior testimonies.

While Sakina's contradictory sentiments about her role in the serial murders raises many questions about the way in which the legal system shapes conceptions of personal agency, this chapter will focus on the historical significance of her claim, "I fooled the government." As discussed in Chapter 1, the development of a wartime economy in Egypt left many workers in Alexandria unemployed, leading to the spread of illicit activities. 'Fooling' the state thus became a necessity for survival. The need to evade the colonial state's wartime control over native labor and resources led to the growing informalization of labor, which in turn subalternized workers, prompting them to organize in ways that were often less visible and comprehensible to the state than traditional working-class organizing. The informal networks that workers developed made them a powerful political force during this period. This was especially true for unemployed and irregularly employed workers, who began mobilizing at the Abū al-‘Abbās mosque near the eastern harbor of Alexandria after Friday midday prayers. These large-scale working-class mobilizations began in late 1919, around the same time that the serial murders began, and they targeted both state institutions and the petite bourgeoisie.⁷ The largest of these uprisings was in

⁵ Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 712.

⁶ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 347.

⁷ For information about the October 1919 uprising, see "The Alexandria Riots," *The Egyptian Gazette*, October 27, 1919, 3.

May 1921, almost immediately after the trial for the Alexandria serial murder case.⁸ Situating the records of the Alexandria serial murder case within the context of these uprisings grants insight into the interests, experiences and grievances of workers who participated in these various forms of subaltern violence in Alexandria in the immediate post-WWI period.

To highlight how 'fooling' the state became a badge of honor in early interwar Alexandria, this chapter makes three interrelated arguments. First, it argues that both the serial murders and the uprisings in Alexandria were rooted in the same working-class struggles. These acts of violence perpetrated by workers were products of collective frustration born out of the hopelessness of other forms of class resistance, particularly for factory, dock and transport workers who had become unemployed as a result of the colonial state's restructuring of Alexandria's economy both during and after the war. For workers who had lost their jobs and day laborers who were irregularly employed, such as Raya and Sakina's husbands and the *fitiwwa* they befriended, collective bargaining was not an option. These workers had become subalternized by Alexandria's wartime economy and had little recourse to distributive justice. Despite the fact that both the serial murders and the uprisings primarily targeted the petite bourgeoisie, Egyptian nationalists proclaimed the robbery and murder of petite bourgeois Europeans during the uprisings to be a form of national resistance, while condemning the robbery and murder of petite bourgeois Egyptians in the serial murder case as barbaric and worthy of punishment by death.⁹ Challenging nationalist historiography requires challenging the

⁸ See *Minutes of Proceedings and Report of the Military Court of Enquiry into the Alexandria Riots, May 1921* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1921).

⁹ For a discussion of the media discourse about the suspects in the serial murder case, see chapter 4. For a discussion of speeches given by Egyptian nationalists at the funeral of those who died in the May 1921 uprisings, see *Minutes of Proceedings*, 242. These speeches argued that those who participated in the uprisings were not thieves motivated by greed but rather national heroes motivated by their love for the nation.

discursive divide between these various forms of working-class resistance and recognizing the common political economic struggles that produced them.

Situating the serial murders in the context of the uprisings also challenges the exceptionalism associated with the sex trade. As discussed in Chapter 2, the men and women employed in the sex trade during this period did not operate in an "underworld" that was isolated from the rest of society but were often irregularly employed workers who attempted to engage in other forms of labor simultaneously. Records about the sex trade thus grant important insight into the ways in which workers' lives were shaped by political economic changes in Alexandria. The sex trade was also central to Alexandria's economy and was therefore affected by the same political economic developments that transformed other industries between 1914 and 1921, particularly state policies that altered the movement of bodies and goods into the port city. While World War I is frequently associated with scarcity, it was also a moment when vast amounts of surplus - both human and material - were accumulated by and for the war effort. When the war came to an end, Alexandria was filled with surplus populations that had been created by the war, including refugees from neighboring countries and native men who had served in the Egyptian Labor Corps. This influx of surplus bodies put a strain on the local sex industry in the same way that the influx of surplus goods after the war hurt local businesses.¹⁰ As this chapter will show, it was at this point that Alexandria's porous boundaries became a problem for workers in both the sex trade and in many other industries across the city. Sex workers thus joined forces with other workers and played a prominent role in the Alexandria uprisings, making the sex trade a valuable

¹⁰ For information on surplus imports into Alexandria in late 1919 and 1920, see *Reports by His Majesty's High Commissioner*, 35 - 36.

case study for the political economic transformations that took place in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Working-class anger towards the state and its policies in the immediate aftermath of the war became a potent force in the Egyptian nationalist movement. Existing scholarship about the relationship between workers and the nationalist movement during this period suggests that the workers' movement was either coopted by middle-class nationalists or that nationalists employed strategic measures to gain the support of workers.¹¹ These explanations strip workers of agency and suggest that they were somehow acting against their own interests by joining forces with middle-class nationalists. In contrast to this literature, this chapter argues that due to the way in which the war had transformed the political economy of Egypt, hardening the porous boundaries of Alexandria was in the interests of not only the native bourgeoisie, but also native workers. The colonial state's exploitation of Alexandria's porous boundaries both during and after the war had become a serious problem for workers, who found themselves suffering from rising levels of unemployment due to the sudden influx of cheaper foreign goods after the war. As will be shown in this chapter, the international political economy that took shape after the war created a distinct form of class consciousness for workers in colonized countries, one that made national resistance an important means of achieving economic justice for workers. Understanding Alexandria's position within this post-WWI international political economy is thus essential to understanding why the workers' movement intersected with the nationalist movement in the early interwar era.

Sakina's taunt about fooling the state must be read in the context of this new political economic landscape. As a native sex worker subjected to rising levels of neglect and surveillance

¹¹ Beinín and Lockman, *Workers on the Nile*.

by the police, Sakina's survival depended on her ability to evade the watchful eye of the state. Her attempt to characterize her participation in the serial murders as a form of resistance to state power suggests that she saw the state as the protector of the propertied interests that the murders had purportedly threatened. The relationship between the state and propertied interests was also apparent in the 1919 - 1921 uprisings, during which workers attacked private property, infrastructure, police stations, and petite bourgeois Europeans and Levantine Christians. Situating the serial murders in the context of the uprisings shows that although workers' grievances were only made comprehensible in historical records when they intersected with those of the nationalist movement, workers had their own distinct interests which had formed at the intersection of race and class. This chapter will analyze the final words of the alleged perpetrators of the serial murders in the context of these broader working-class concerns and will highlight the way in which they were shaped by the shifting political economy of early interwar Alexandria.

The Political Economy of the Sex Trade in Early Interwar Alexandria

"I swear if I had lived another year, I would have put an end to prostitutes and would have prevented every single one of them from walking the streets of the city. Those prostitutes betray their husbands and sell their honor for a quarter of a riyal."¹²

Ḥasab Allah's final words at his execution symbolized the shifting political economy of Alexandria's sex trade after the war. As discussed in Chapter 2, the wartime economy had created

¹² "Usābat Ightīāl al-Nisā' wi A' dāmuhum," *al-Ahrām*.

opportunities for independent production in Alexandria, particularly in the sex industry.¹³ In a desire to increase its control over the movement of bodies and goods for the war effort, the colonial state had banished well-known traffickers such as Ibrāhīm al-Gharbī to the countryside.¹⁴ It also prohibited seasonal migration to Alexandria and took harsher measures against the licensed sex trade in the name of protecting British soldiers from venereal disease, thereby enabling local Alexandrian women to dominate the sex trade during the war.

Streetwalking became more prevalent, particularly among married women and petite bourgeois women who owned the gold and clothing necessary to attract clients. It was this new space for independent production that enabled Raya and Sakina's small business venture to thrive. Through informal connections they developed in al-Labbān's local marketplaces, the sisters tapped into the growing informal economy of sex work to establish what became a popular unlicensed brothel near a military camp.

After the war, the political economic structure that had enabled the prevalence of independent production in the sex trade shifted, giving rise to domestic sex trafficking and the death of independent sex workers. As discussed in Chapter 3, the murder victims in this case were primarily independent sex workers who had the gold, clothing, and freedom to attract their own clients and take them to different brothels around the city. The majority of the murder victims for whom police reports were filed were petite bourgeois women, and while not all of them were married, most of them had male family members who were allegedly unaware of the

¹³ By independent production in the sex trade, I mean sex workers who were not financed or controlled by souteneurs, brothel owners or traffickers. See Chapter 2 for further information on the structure of the sex trade in Alexandria.

¹⁴ Francesca Biancani, "Let Down the Curtains," 119.

victim's secret part-time job.¹⁵ As Ḥasab Allah's statement makes clear, for those who sought to profit from the sex trade, their concern was not younger sex workers who could be traded and sold to other brothels but rather increasingly mobile and independent sex workers who had the resources to evade the control of sex traffickers. It was independent production in the sex trade and the patriarchal norms it violated that Ḥasab Allah sought to destroy.

While previous chapters have discussed the rise of domestic sex trafficking and its role in the murder of streetwalkers after the war, this section will explore the shifting political economic structure that brought an end to independent sex work in Alexandria. This shift in the sex trade was due not only to the reopening of trade routes and the relaxation of wartime restrictions on mobility and migration into Alexandria, but more importantly to the increased availability of impoverished, exploitable populations created by the war. The war created three main surplus populations in Alexandria that became involved in sex trafficking: native men who had served as manual laborers for the British army during the war and were neglected thereafter by the colonial state,¹⁶ young native women and teenage girls whose families had become impoverished by the wartime economy or had fallen victim to the spread of disease during the war,¹⁷ and young women and girls from across the Mediterranean world who sought refuge from violence and famine in Alexandria, including Syrian, Armenian, and Greek refugees.¹⁸ The existence of

¹⁵ See Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 1 - 25.

¹⁶ For more information on the recruitment/conscription of native men into the Egyptian Labor Corps, see Chapter 1.

¹⁷ Aisha, one of the teenage girls that had been trafficked by Raya and Sakina's network, became a sex worker to care for her sick mother. See 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 159. See also Gallagher, *Egypt's Other Wars*, 12 for a summary of the spread of disease in Egypt during WWI.

¹⁸ The colonial state's report about the May 1921 uprising in Alexandria notes that Syrians, Armenians and Greeks were the primary targets of 'mob' violence in the early interwar period. *Minutes of Proceedings*, 254.

populations in Alexandria that were made expendable and surplus by the exigencies and consequences of war enabled traffickers to exploit the labor of impoverished women and girls to the point of indentured servitude. The increased availability of exploitable labor after the war was thus one of the primary reasons for the proliferation of trafficking networks.

A new gender politics of labor migration due to both the creation of a world system of nation-states as well as the spread of middle-class modernity also contributed to the rise of trafficking networks. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire came the collapse of the Mediterranean world, and Alexandria was reintegrated into an international political economy rather than a Mediterranean political economy. The imposition of nation-state controls on the circulation of bodies and goods through borders and passports created a structural need for trafficking networks to assist female migrants in evading controls on mobility.¹⁹ The political regulation of movement and migration was also compounded by the spread of middle-class notions of respectability, which advocated a cult of domesticity and limited mobility for women. As discussed in Chapter 4, the early interwar era was characterized by middle-class and colonial state attempts to reassert patriarchal control over women's bodies, leading to the popularization of a gendered civilizing discourse that advocated the domestication of women. This gendered discourse affected the mobility of women after the war, and police records note that young women who attempted to travel to Alexandria by themselves were frequently turned away at the port on suspicions that they were planning to engage in sex work.²⁰ Young women needed a male companion to move into and through the city, which further enabled patriarchal control over the

¹⁹ League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 62.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 64.

movement of sex workers.²¹ Thus, despite the fact that sex workers had become increasingly mobile after the war, the combination of political and cultural restrictions on their mobility created conditions for the rise of trafficking networks.

Increased state surveillance of the clandestine sex trade after the war increased the vulnerability of women who attempted to engage in clandestine sex work, leaving them dependent on trafficking networks that could shelter them from the police. This increased surveillance caused the unlicensed sex trade to become dependent on the licensed sex trade for survival. As discussed in Chapter 2, while state officials frequently turned a blind eye to the clandestine sex trade during the war, the colonial state took an aggressive stance towards illicit activities after the war, prompting increased surveillance of working-class neighborhoods. Thus, the police shut down Raya and Sakina's most successful brothel, "The Camp," leading the sisters to downsize and embark on a joint business venture with their landlord, Amīna bint Mansūr, who ran the bottom floor of the building as a hashish cafe while the sisters ran the top floor as a clandestine brothel. After several police raids, this smaller brothel was also permanently shut down by police, at which point the sisters began to run their clandestine sex business out of their homes.²² These closures created logistical difficulties for the sisters and their business partners, who no longer had the space they needed to run their business the way they had during the war. They therefore became increasingly dependent on the formal economy for survival and began selling impoverished underage sex workers into the licensed sex trade. The sisters and their

²¹ See Paul Kinsie's report about the sex trade in interwar Alexandria in Jean-Michel Chaumont, Magaly Rodriguez Garcia and Paul Servais (eds), *Trafficking in Women 1924-1926: The Paul Kinsie Reports for the League of Nations* (Geneva: United Nations Publications, 2016).

²² 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 182.

business partners sold these underage sex workers to licensed Greek brothels due to the fact that the capitulations granted European businesses greater protection from police surveillance.²³ State surveillance was thus racialized, and this racialization fueled native dependence on European-controlled sectors of the licensed sex trade. These colonial dynamics of sex work in Alexandria made traffickers' control over sex workers' bodies a necessity for those involved in the clandestine sex trade.

The combination of increased police surveillance, restrictions on female mobility, and the proliferation of surplus populations in Alexandria led to the empowerment of trafficking networks and the murder of independent laborers in the local clandestine sex trade after the war. It is for this reason that Sakina's survival as a streetwalker depended on cooperating with trafficking networks and 'fooling' the state. At this moment, Alexandria's porous boundaries became a concern not only for middle-class nationalists who sought control over national boundaries, but also for workers who sought to protect their jobs and resources from the rapidly expanding pool of more exploitable surplus populations. This large-scale movement of migrants and refugees through Alexandria's porous boundaries both during and after the war, combined with increased police surveillance, empowered neighborhood authorities such as the *fitiwwa*, who were traditionally expected to protect their working-class neighborhoods from outsiders. The next section will examine the role of the *fitiwwa* in the serial murders and Alexandria uprisings, and how the *fitiwwa* became a platform for working-class resistance to state power.

²³ See Chapter 2 for further discussion of the role that capitulations played in the sex trade.

The *Fitiwwa* Versus the Police

While Sakina articulated her resistance to state power as deception, the *fitiwwa* who were executed for the serial murders articulated their critique of the state through a discourse of injustice and oppression. Throughout the investigation, trial and executions, ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf and ‘Urābī Ḥassān insisted that they were innocent of the crime. "*Mazlūm*" - "oppressed" - was the term they repeatedly used in response to the allegations read by the state prosecutor, judges and executioner.²⁴ Unlike the other suspects, the state prosecutor had found no evidence against ‘Abd al-Rāziq or ‘Urābī other than the testimonies of other suspects. The two primary witnesses against them were Raya and Sakina, yet the sisters were allegedly not physically present during the murders.²⁵ Neither ‘Abd al-Rāziq nor ‘Urābī were found in possession of any of the victims' belongings, and at trial, Raya and Sakina's husbands insisted that the two *fitiwwa* had not been involved in the murders.²⁶ At the executions, the *fitiwwa* once again proclaimed their innocence, and Raya and Sakina's husbands once again supported their assertions.²⁷ The state prosecutor and judges had decided to execute the *fitiwwa* based primarily on Raya and Sakina's accusations as well as rumors that they had each been sleeping with one of the murder victims.

Given that the job of the *fitiwwa* was to protect their neighborhood from outsiders, the state prosecutor's decision to execute the *fitiwwa* based on Raya and Sakina's testimonies is

²⁴ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 215; "Tanfīz Ḥikm al-A‘dām fī al-Thalatha al-Ākharīn min ‘Usbat al-Saffāhīn [The Execution of the Death Sentence for the Other Three of the Serial Killing Gang]," *al-Baṣīr*, December 22, 1921.

²⁵ See Raya and Sakina's depositions in Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 692 - 752.

²⁶ "Al-Ḥikm fī Qadayyat ‘Usbat al-Saffāhīn [The Sentence in the Trial of the Serial Killing Gang]," *al-Ahālī*, May 17, 1921, 3.

²⁷ "‘Usābat Ightīāl al-Nisā’ wi A‘dāmuhum," *al-Ahrām*.

surprising. The fact that Raya and Sakina had moved from Upper Egypt to the al-Labbān district of Alexandria during the war meant that they were likely considered outsiders; the *fitiwwa* thus had a social responsibility to harass them, particularly in light of the fact that the sisters were recruiting sex workers from other neighborhoods. New waves of surplus populations to Alexandria during and after the war posed a significant challenge to the authority of the *fitiwwa* and may have led to increased harassment. New conceptions of the boundary between insiders and outsiders in the nationalist imagination also challenged the logic upon which the authority of the *fitiwwa* rested and made their behavior towards native newcomers from the countryside appear increasingly abusive to middle-class nationalists. Given the nature of the *fitiwwa*'s authority, it is very likely that Raya and Sakina's complaints about their abusive behavior were accurate. And yet for this same reason, it is unlikely that the *fitiwwa* participated in any type of joint venture with the sisters or their husbands. The state prosecutor's decision to charge these six suspects as a "gang of serial killers" thus defies the social realities of their historical context.

The state's controversial decision to execute ‘Abd al-Rāziq and ‘Urābī despite their unsubstantiated role in the serial murders likely relates to the degree of social and political power exercised by *fitiwwa* over subalterns in Alexandria. As discussed in Chapter 2, the fact that the *fitwāna* was a longstanding brotherhood encompassing a wide range of social classes in the urban centers of Egypt meant that its members possessed significant social and political capital. The power exercised by the *fitiwwa* was both charismatic and coercive, and some of them managed to get into positions of formal and informal leadership in a number of industries. Aḥmad Al-Gidr, one of the *fitiwwa* who was detained for several weeks and released during the second half of the investigation, was a manager at the Alexandria port, where he had control over

40 - 50 workers.²⁸ Muḥammad al-Sammāk, another *fitiwwa* who was mentioned in the police reports yet never detained, was the leader of a large group of fisherman in Alexandria.²⁹ According to witness statements, even lower-ranking *fitiwwa* without formal positions of authority such as ‘Abd al-Rāziq had the power to incite uprisings and the looting of stores.³⁰ The power held by the *fitiwwa* was not unique to Alexandria, and Hanan Hammad notes that the *fitiwwa* of Mahalla al-Kubra played a similar leadership role in factories.³¹ These positions of leadership gave the *fitiwwa* significant control over regularly and irregularly employed workers in a variety of industries. As shown in Chapter 3, while this power was sometimes abused to coerce witnesses to stay silent about criminal activity, it was also used to mobilize workers for economic gain and other political struggles.

Despite evidence that the *fitiwwa* exercised some degree of formal or informal authority over workers in many sectors of the economy, they have largely been absent from the study of modern Egyptian labor history. Yet their power over workers is important for understanding both the outcome of this case as well as the large-scale uprisings that took place in Alexandria during the early interwar period. As discussed in Chapter 1, the colonial state had expanded its control over native workers during the war for the purpose of securing manual labor for the Allied war effort. Yet labor historians have argued that the Egyptian middle class was also attempting to increase its control over workers in the wake of the 1919 Revolution, largely for the purpose of

²⁸ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 201.

²⁹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 140.

³⁰ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 216.

³¹ Hammad, “Mechanizing People, Localizing Modernity,” 148 - 149.

gaining support for the Egyptian nationalist movement. Joel Beinin's study of Egyptian working class formation shows that the growing number of trade unions in Cairo and Alexandria after the war were led by "effendis, beys, lawyers and other intellectuals" rather than workers.³² The attempts made by both the colonial state and the Egyptian middle class to increase their control over workers in the early interwar era brought them into conflict with the *fitiwwa*, particularly those from the working class. Working-class *fitiwwa* were perceived as a barrier to state and middle-class control over workers. Thus, among the *fitiwwa* detained during the investigation of the serial murders, the state prosecutor charged only working-class *fitiwwa* with the crime, releasing *fitiwwa* from higher social classes and those with formal positions of authority in the workforce.

The perception that the state's treatment of the *fitiwwa* in this case was an act of injustice emerges more clearly in the immediate aftermath of the murder trial, which took place on May 11 - 13, 1921. While there had been a series of nationalist demonstrations in Alexandria since March 1919, the weeks leading up to the murder trial were relatively quiet. Small demonstrations began once again during the trial, and colonial state officials characterized them as 'hostile' in comparison to the 'peaceful' nationalist demonstrations that had preceded them.³³ After the verdict was announced on May 16, 1921, the demonstrations suddenly became violent. Newspapers reported that after the judges read the verdict, Sakina's husband, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Āl, stood up in the courtroom and announced that ‘Abd al-Rāziq Yūsuf and ‘Urābī Ḥassān

³² Beinin, "Formation of the Egyptian Working Class," 20.

³³ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 11.

were innocent of the crime.³⁴ His statement caused a big uproar in the courtroom which prompted the police to step in.³⁵ That evening, demonstrators armed themselves with sticks and stones, attacking government buildings and breaking the windows of the *al-Ahālī* newspaper offices.³⁶ The next day, the crowd grew and began throwing stones at police stations. They also stormed the Ministry of Awqāf, the government agency responsible for the management of charitable endowments that provided housing for the poor.³⁷ The crowd continued to grow each day thereafter until the uprising reached a climax after mid-day prayers on Friday, May 20, 1921, at which point thousands of working-class men launched coordinated attacks on police stations around the city.³⁸ These attacks consisted of stoning various police stations across Alexandria in the districts of al-Gumruk, al-Manshiyya, al-‘Attārīn, al-Labbān and Karmūz, in addition to dousing police records in petrol and setting them on fire.³⁹ In al-Labbān, where the serial murders had taken place, the entire police station was set on fire.⁴⁰

While colonial officials noted that the demonstrations in Alexandria after May 11th appeared different in nature from the demonstrations that had preceded them, they attributed this change in character to increased aggression on the part of nationalist activists. They made no mention of the murder trial in their reports, despite its temporal and spatial proximity to the

³⁴ "Al-Ḥikm fī Qadayyat ‘Usbat al-Saffāḥīn," *al-Ahālī*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 11.

³⁷ See "Muḏāhara [Demonstration]," *al-Ahālī*, May 19, 1921, 3, which states that demonstrators had stormed the Ministry of Awqāf two days earlier.

³⁸ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

uprising and the great deal of attention it had received in the Egyptian media. In a moment of historical amnesia, colonial records about the May 1921 uprising also made no mention of the fact that there had been a large-scale uprising in Alexandria that was markedly similar in character less than two years earlier. On October 24, 1919, working-class men and youth had gathered at the same Abū al-‘Abbās mosque and proceeded to stone British troops and police forces. As in the May 1921 uprising, demonstrators in October 1919 had begun attacking European residents shortly thereafter. In the wake of both uprisings, the colonial state attributed the violence to nationalist politics.⁴¹ Colonial officials had a tendency to attribute all uprisings during this period to a carefully orchestrated nationalist conspiracy, granting nationalism a tremendous amount of explanatory power.⁴² Yet a closer look at the details of the May 1921 uprising reveals that there is no evidence it was organized by nationalists. In fact, although some nationalists joined the uprising and attempted to take credit for it, it appears that nationalist leaders were unable to control the violence. On May 18th, the Alexandria police arrested a known nationalist leader in Alexandria named Abdullah Koraim, along with nine other suspected ringleaders.⁴³ The following day, the Commandant of the Alexandria City Police telephoned Aḥmad Pasha Yehia, leader of the Zaghlulists in Alexandria, who allegedly gave him a solemn promise that the violence would stop.⁴⁴ According to a secret agent's report, Aḥmad Pasha Yehia made a speech the very next day before large numbers of people at the Abū al-‘Abbās mosque in

⁴¹ "The Alexandria Riots," *The Egyptian Gazette*, October 27, 1919, 3.

⁴² On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 200.

⁴³ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 11 - 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

the Ras al-Tīn district of Alexandria, urging the audience to demonstrate peacefully.⁴⁵ Yet these efforts bore no fruit, and the violent uprising only grew exponentially.

In addition to their lack of control over the uprising, nationalists did not appear to condone the violent tactics used by the demonstrators. Egyptian journalists, who constantly published articles in support of the nationalist movement, expressed a degree of alarm and disapproval with the extent of the violence, particularly when it was subsequently directed at European and Levantine shops. In Cairo, journalists noted that the violence was out of character for the nationalist movement, which usually respected business interests.⁴⁶ Even the Levantine diaspora in Buenos Aires expressed alarm over the uprising in Alexandria in their local newspapers.⁴⁷ The uprising was perceived as hostile to middle-class interests, which was deemed uncharacteristic of the nationalist movement.

According to the witness statements of high-ranking Alexandria police officers, the participants, discourse, and targets of the uprising were also markedly different from those of previous nationalist demonstrations. Ibrāhīm Ḥamdī, the al-Labbān police officer who played a central role in the investigation of the serial murders, called the participants "low-class people" as opposed to the usual students and effendis who participated in nationalist demonstrations.⁴⁸ The police saw very few effendis during the uprising, and some of the men identified by witnesses as effendis were in fact dressed in ways that the *fitiwwa* typically dressed, wearing a

⁴⁵ Ibid., 241.

⁴⁶ "Akhbār al-Iskandirayya: al-Muzāharāt! [Alexandria News: Demonstrations!]," *al-Ahrām*, May 21, 1921, 3.

⁴⁷ "Al-'Urūbiyīn fī al-Iskandirayya [The Europeans in Alexandria]," *al-Salām*, May 23, 1921, 3.

⁴⁸ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 22.

galabayya and black coat with a ṭarbūsh rather than a suit with a ṭarbūsh.⁴⁹ At the beginning of the uprising, participants attacked not only institutions of the colonial state, but also media, such as the newspaper offices of *Wādī al-Nīl*,⁵⁰ and Islamic state institutions, such as the Ministry of Awqāf, which was responsible for managing charitable endowments that housed the poor.⁵¹ The discourse of the participants was also as varied as their targets. Colonial records note that a variety of political opinions were voiced during the uprising. Some expressed support for the head of the Wafd Party, Saad Zaghlul, while others argued that, "Egypt will never obtain independence by Zaghlul, nor any other Pasha; but only by means of a general rising and massacre if necessary."⁵² Other participants were allegedly pan-Islamist, rallying in support of the new Turkish nationalist leader, Mustapha Kemal, rather than Egyptian nationalist leaders.⁵³ The witness statements of the Alexandria police thus give the impression of an ideologically and politically diverse movement.

Despite the confusion of the Alexandria police about the origins of the uprising, colonial officials were certain that the attacks on the police stations across Alexandria were highly coordinated. Several witnesses testified that the participants in the uprising moved together at the sound of a whistle.⁵⁴ The proceedings of the military court of enquiry into the riots state, "There is no doubt, moreover, that the mobs had a very definite organisation. M. de Witasse, the French

⁴⁹ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 74. Ḥasab Allah also began to dress in a galabayya, coat and ṭarbūsh after the serial murders began. See Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 471.

⁵⁰ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 11.

⁵¹ See "Muzāhara," *al-Ahālī*.

⁵² *Minutes of Proceedings*, 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74 and 255.

consul, gives evidence of the attack on the café on Sunday night, facing the consulate. The mob acted under the directions of a man with a whistle, and drew off at once at a blast from the whistle. There is other testimony of mobs acting under the direction of men with whistles. Small mobs concealed themselves in side streets, and acted so quickly that their victims had no chance. The Court has found no evidence as to what this organisation was; or by whom it was directed - it had a very definite existence, and must have been formed for some purpose."⁵⁵ The court then went on to argue that the leaders of the uprising must have been the nationalist Zaghlul Party, even though it admitted that it had no evidence to support its suspicion. As shown above, the evidence in fact suggests that nationalists had little control over the uprising.

While the leadership of the uprising remains a mystery, what is more significant are the popular grievances that motivated thousands of workers to participate in the attacks. The state's increased surveillance and neglect of the local population after the war provoked widespread discontent, and cries of "There is no government" were heard throughout Alexandria during the uprising.⁵⁶ While the uprising in this instance may have been provoked by the announcement of the verdict in the Alexandria serial murder case, this was clearly not the first uprising of its kind in early interwar Alexandria. This suggests that the serial murder case was emblematic of broader grievances that workers had against both the state and the petite bourgeoisie, for although the uprising on May 20, 1921 was primarily directed at the police, two days later there was civil strife in the racially mixed, working-class/petite bourgeois districts of Alexandria. This episode

⁵⁵ Ibid., 266.

⁵⁶ See *Minutes of Proceedings*, 266. Also, in a talk at UCLA on May 10, 2016, entitled, "Masculinity, Ideology and the Human in Post-2011 Egyptian "Thug" Films, Frances Hasso noted that cries of "There is no government" are also heard in post-2011 "thug" films during moments of popular anger at police abuse.

of subaltern violence erupted between workers and the petite bourgeoisie at the intersection of race, class and religion, simultaneously splitting the police force along the lines of race and rank. The upper echelon of the police force, which was primarily under the control of European colonial officers, defended the European residents and attacked Egyptians, while the lower ranks of the police force, which consisted of Egyptians from the countryside, defended native residents and attacked Europeans.⁵⁷ The emergence of class and racial solidarities in the low-income areas of Alexandria, dividing both residents and local authorities, marked a turning point for Alexandria's position within Egypt's broader anti-colonial struggle in the early interwar era. The next section will examine how these new fault lines were rooted in the same political economic developments that had given rise to the serial murders.

Dumping, Profiteering and the Consequences of Capitalist Penetration

"The whole town is in a state of anarchy."⁵⁸

On Sunday, May 22, 1921, after a day of relative calm, the Alexandria police began receiving reports of violent exchanges between natives and Europeans. Native workers were allegedly looting European shops, beating and robbing Europeans in the street, and setting fire to the homes of European families. At the same time, petite bourgeois Europeans were shooting at natives from their second-story balconies, while European workers were looting Egyptian shops.

⁵⁷ For more information on the makeup of the police force in Alexandria, see Hanley, "Foreignness and Localness," Chapter 2.

⁵⁸ Spoken by MP Earl Winterton at a British parliamentary debate on May 26, 1921 in reference to the Alexandria riots, accessed April 2016, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1921/may/26/riots-alexandria>.

While native workers allegedly targeted Greeks, various European nationalities were involved, along with Levantine Christians. The violence lasted for two days and resulted in 88 people killed, 238 wounded, and large-scale damage to property and infrastructure.⁵⁹ Nearly all the violence occurred in the racially mixed districts of al-Labbān, al-Manshiyya, and al-‘Aṭṭārīn, with the majority of the violence taking place around Anastāsī Street and al-Saba‘ Banāt Street.



Figure 5.1: Map of Alexandria showing Anastāsī Street and al-Saba‘ Banāt Street (highlighted together in red)

⁵⁹ Woodward, "Hats and Tarbooshes," Introduction.

Colonial state records were primarily concerned with the racial dimensions of the violence. After listening to various testimonies, the court of enquiry concluded, "Always there has existed in Egypt, at any rate, among the lower classes, a fanatical hatred of Europeans."⁶⁰ Yet the testimonies revealed a clear class dimension to the uprising that the court overlooked in its analysis of the evidence. The violent exchanges on May 22nd and 23rd took place between working-class natives and petite bourgeois Europeans, and between working-class Europeans and petite bourgeois natives. The police force also became divided along class lines, with low-ranking officers from the countryside defending native workers and high-ranking colonial officers defending petite bourgeois Europeans. It is therefore impossible to speak about the racial tensions that sparked this episode of violence without simultaneously speaking about class tensions. This section of the chapter will trace these class tensions to the reintegration of Alexandria into a capitalist world economy beginning in 1919, highlighting the way in which the uneven movement of bodies and goods into Alexandria after the removal of wartime restrictions on trade led to both the uprisings and the serial murders that preceded them.

While the violence between workers and the petite bourgeoisie in May 1921 was largely due to postwar developments, these class tensions also had their roots in wartime policies. As discussed in Chapter 1, the colonial state implemented tariffs and price ceilings at the beginning of the war to which European shopkeepers in Alexandria vociferously objected. These shopkeepers had become accustomed to importing European goods under the low customs duties afforded to them by the capitulations, and the restrictions on trade during the war negatively impacted their businesses. According to a petition submitted by the Greek Shopkeepers Guild of

⁶⁰ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 266.

Alexandria on August 28, 1914, Greek shopkeepers and merchants protested price controls on a number of items, including Egyptian butter, cottonseed oil, and alcohol, arguing that they could not make a profit off the sale of these items at the designated prices.⁶¹ They complained in particular about the price of Egyptian butter and argued that it should not be subject to price controls because it was considered a luxury product in Alexandria rather than a basic good.⁶² Despite the fact that this association was successful in modifying a few of the prices, newspaper reports from the war years alleged that shopkeepers often evaded the price controls and hid their products in order to sell them on the black market at a higher price, thereby exacerbating wartime shortages.⁶³ Egyptian Gazette frequently wrote about "profiteering" and listed the names of merchants who had been prosecuted for selling above the price ceiling.⁶⁴ Colonial state officials also accused shopkeepers of refusing to adhere to price controls on basic food necessities,⁶⁵ and newspaper reports documented a number of bread riots, particularly in the first few months of the war.⁶⁶ Thus, rather than alleviating the plight of the urban poor, the price controls led to a series of conflicts between workers and the petite bourgeoisie.

The petite bourgeoisie continued to be blamed for worsening economic conditions after the war. Inflation skyrocketed in 1920, and the cost of living index rose to 237 in 1920 compared

⁶¹ Mukātabat Lajnat al-Tamwīn, September 29, 1914, Egyptian National Archives.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Sālim, *Miṣr fil-Harb*, 142.

⁶⁴ "Egypt's Food Profiteers," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 27, 1919, 4.

⁶⁵ "Letter from Cairo, July 15, 1918," *Great Britain and the East, Volume 14*, 659, accessed April 2016, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=PMFCAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PR2>.

⁶⁶ "Egypt's Unemployed: Demonstrations in Cairo: Another Crowd Crying for Bread: Extraordinary Scenes in the Mousky This Morning," *The Egyptian Gazette*, September 1, 1914, 3.

to its prewar level of 100.⁶⁷ According to the 1921 statistics published by the Egyptian state, the cost of some basic food necessities such as beans and lentils had nearly doubled between 1919 and 1920 alone.⁶⁸ The price of basic food necessities was also frequently higher in Alexandria than in Cairo during the early interwar period.⁶⁹ Even when wholesale prices allegedly went down, retail prices did not, and newspapers frequently accused grocers, butchers and gas peddlers of dishonesty.⁷⁰ Suspicions of fraud and dishonesty were also leveled against a couple of the victims of the Alexandria serial murders. According to Sakina, Raya frequently suspected that people she did business with were cheating her.⁷¹ These suspicions may have had something to do with the murder of Zannūba the chicken dealer, who, according to Sakina, was murdered on the day she came to Raya's home to collect a long overdue payment.⁷² It may also have had something to do with the murder of Salīma the gas peddler, who was one of the only victims that did not appear to be engaged in sex work.⁷³

Yet even when prices went down, tensions between workers and the petit bourgeoisie continued. According to British sources, by early 1921, economic conditions had improved and prices had begun to fall, leading to a rapid relaxation of price controls and further removal of

⁶⁷ See Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment*, 212.

⁶⁸ Wizārat al-Māliyya, *Al-Iḥṣā' al-Sanawi al-Ām lil-Qaṭr al-Miṣrī li-Sanat 1921*, 113.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁰ "Profiteering," *The Egyptian Gazette*, July 12, 1919, 4.

⁷¹ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 252.

⁷² Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, microfilm, 712 - 752.

⁷³ ʿĪsa, *Rijāl Raya wi Sakina*, 412.

trade restrictions by June 1921.⁷⁴ While still higher than prewar years, the cost of living index fell to 196.⁷⁵ Scholars have noted this sudden decline in prices in 1921, and according to historian Afaf Marsot, it was "a blessing for the poor."⁷⁶ The May 1921 uprisings thus happened as prices were beginning to fall. Yet if economic conditions had allegedly improved by this time, then what accounts for the violent exchanges between workers and the petit bourgeoisie?

To understand what gave rise to the May 1921 uprising, it is necessary to look beyond the cost of living index and examine the way in which bodies and goods moved into Alexandria after the war. The focus on prices as an indicator of economic improvement was rooted in an ideology of consumerism, which upheld purchasing power and consumption as the foundation of a strong economy.⁷⁷ The purchasing power of the growing middle class in Egypt became a primary concern for both European and American capitalists during this period, as both sought markets for their expanding industries.⁷⁸ These interests in middle-class consumption in turn shaped official discourse and data about the economy, leading to the production of economic assessments based on the consumption of commodities. Yet the focus on the decline in prices masked the fact that in the interest of expanding export markets for Allied industries and ensuring that capital flowed to Allied powers after the war, the British extended wartime export

⁷⁴ *Reports by His Majesty's High Commissioner*, 60.

⁷⁵ Mak, *The British in Egypt*, 230.

⁷⁶ Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment*, 212.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the role of consumption in conceptions of economy, see Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁷⁸ See United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, "Extension of American Trade with Egypt," in *Commerce Reports Nos. 14 - 26, Volume 2, Twenty-Fifth Year, April, May, June 1922* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 252 - 253, accessed April 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=DKhPAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA253&dq=egyptian+imports+1920+extension+of+American+trade+with+egypt&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjBg7GburfOAhVoD8AKHVZ1BxQQ6AEIIzAB#v=onepage&q&f=false>

bans on many domestic products in Egypt while simultaneously removing wartime restrictions on imports.⁷⁹ Colonial records note that in light of this development, merchants in Egypt bought massive quantities of goods from foreign industries throughout 1920, which in turn drove down the prices of certain products.⁸⁰ In fact, merchants bought so much more than what could be consumed by the local population that a significant portion of the merchandise remained on the docks at the port of Alexandria.⁸¹ Trade statistics for Egypt for the first nine months of 1921 thus show that the value of imports was more than double the value of exports.⁸² Newspaper reports from this period indicate that bourgeois panic over the fear of Germany dumping its surplus commodities into their markets further fueled the rush to buy and sell.⁸³

While this influx of cheap foreign goods into Alexandria benefited the petite bourgeoisie and contributed to a decline in prices in 1921, workers did not benefit from this alleged improvement in economic conditions because domestic factory owners responded to these developments by decreasing wages, firing workers, and adopting new strategies and technologies to cut costs. The Egyptian cigarette industry is one of the many industries that was negatively

⁷⁹ The list of articles subject to export bans was gradually relaxed in 1920 but maintained until 1921. See *Reports by His Majesty's High Commissioner*, 42 - 43 and 60.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 20 and 36.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* While this report does not specify who these merchants were, given the legal and financial advantages granted by the capitulations, they were most likely European and Levantine Christian merchants. For more information about the capitulations, see Chapters 1 and 2.

⁸² See United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, "Egyptian Unfavorable Trade Balance," in *Commerce Reports Nos. 1 - 17, Volume 4, Twenty-Fourth Year, September, October, November, December 1921* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 1054, accessed April 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=9FdJAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA1054&dq=egyptian+unfavorable+trade+balance&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjBwbixrfOAhWBJcAKHRjiDb4Q6AEIGzAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁸³ These fears were publicized in *The Egyptian Gazette*, a newspaper largely sympathetic to British business interests in Egypt. A letter to the editor on January 3, 1919 began, "Now that we have won the war on sea and land, are we marshalling our forces for the economic war which will surely follow? Most members of the Government profess to be fully alive to the necessity for protection against German dumping ..." See "The Future of British Trade," *The Egyptian Gazette*, January 3, 1919, 7.

impacted by these global political economic changes. Hand-rolled cigarettes had long been the second-largest export commodity in Egypt after cotton, but cigarette factory owners in Egypt attempted to decrease the costs of production after the war by replacing hand-rolled cigarettes with machine-rolled cigarettes. In 1920, mechanization led to the termination of 1,076 cigarette rollers in Alexandria and Cairo, and cigarette rollers continued to lose their jobs in subsequent years.⁸⁴ Although labor historians have treated mechanization as a natural outcome of capitalist development that had been forestalled by the organization of the labor force,⁸⁵ the fact that mechanization happened immediately after the war despite numerous strikes indicates that this shift was caused by the way in which Alexandria was reintegrated into the world economy. While the post-WWI rush to purchase large quantities of cheaper, mass-produced commodities from overseas markets put a strain on the Egyptian cigarette industry, the loss of German markets created even greater hardship. Germany had long been the largest consumer of hand-rolled Egyptian cigarettes until the beginning of World War I, but this relationship was permanently altered by the war.⁸⁶ Even after the war came to an end, Germany bought its cigarettes primarily from the U.S. and Britain. In the wake of these global political economic changes, the Egyptian cigarette industry was forced to mechanize.

The records of the May 1921 uprising grant some insight into the fate of cigarette workers during this period. Witness testimonies indicate that some of the participants in the uprising were cigarette factory workers who had recently lost their jobs. According to Ṣāgh ‘Abd

⁸⁴ See Shechter, *Smoking, Culture and Economy in the Middle East*, 90 - 91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

al-Ḥamīd Kamal, chief of the Mīnā' al-Baṣal police station, a cigarette factory owned by an Armenian family named Matossian had been stoned during the riots at the 'instigation' of a worker who had recently been dismissed.⁸⁷ The details of the uprising suggest that as strikes failed, unemployed workers resorted to other forms of protest to express their grievances. These forms of protest - especially those that involved a variety of workers - have been overlooked by labor historians who have focused their attention on more easily recognizable forms of class struggle, such as strikes. The difficulty of studying these forms of protest has also been compounded by colonial records that labeled unrecognizable violence as 'fanatical hatred' and attributed it to the nationalist movement. In uprisings characterized by intersecting fault lines, colonial officials frequently emphasized nation and religion as the most salient categories of identity to the exclusion of class, thereby silencing the socioeconomic grievances that contributed to these uprisings.⁸⁸ Reading the records of the May 1921 uprising against the grain thus reveals that despite the fall in prices during this period, workers experienced increased hardship due to the reintegration of Alexandria into an international capitalist economy.

The challenges faced by cigarette workers in the early interwar period were comparable to the challenges faced by workers in other industries. Another product that was imported into Egypt at an increasingly high rate in 1921 was butter. According to statistics compiled by the International Institute of Refrigeration, the quantity of fresh and salted butter imports into Egypt increased fourfold in one year, rising from 23,949 kilograms in 1920 to 104,128 kilograms in

⁸⁷ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 213 - 214.

⁸⁸ It was also in the interest of middle-class nationalists to silence these socioeconomic grievances by presenting workers' protests as motivated solely by nationalist sentiment.

1921.⁸⁹ Dairy producers in the United States also complained about this sudden availability of butter on the world market in 1921, noting that cheaper, low-quality butter was being dumped into their markets because Europeans were too poor to eat it.⁹⁰ This claim is supported by statistics about British consumption from 1920, which show that the British were in fact using oleomargarine as a substitute for butter and that butter imports had decreased by 255,769,472 lbs. compared to its prewar average.⁹¹ In light of the sudden availability of cheap butter on the world market after the war, dairy factory owners in certain parts of the United States formed collectives to protect against competition and turned to advertising to convince the population to buy their higher quality butter. But while the U.S. and Britain took measures to prevent against the dumping of cheap butter into their markets, Britain allowed this product to be dumped into its colonies.

The sudden influx of butter imports into Alexandria in 1920 - 21 put a strain on Egyptian dairy businesses. While research into Alexandria's dairy workers has yet to be done, the records of the uprising indicate that there was a great deal of anger around the subject of butter during the May 1921 uprising. According to several European witnesses, a group of natives killed a European man and set his body on fire, while another group of natives in a cafe across the street

⁸⁹ Institut International du Froid (Convention de Paris du 21 Juin 1920), *Monthly Bulletin of Information on Refrigeration (English Edition), Third Year - No 1, January 1922* (Paris: Head Office of the Institute), 244, accessed April 2016, <https://books.google.com/books?id=bBHOAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA244&dq=international+institute+of+refrigeration+egypt+butter+1920&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjP7sumuLjOAhVmLcAKHbOnARYQ6wEIHDAA#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁹⁰ "Startling Facts for Dairymen," *Pacific Rural Press* 101:12, March 19, 1921, accessed April 2016, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=PRP19210319.2.42>.

⁹¹ See "England's Butter Imports Far Below Normal Amount," in *The Market Reporter, Volume 3, January - June 1921* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Markets), 96, accessed April 2016, https://books.google.com/books?id=SIoWAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA96&dq=%22england's+butter+imports+far+below%22&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjT4cHdvLjOAhUGziYKHdRuB_EQ6AEIGzAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

shouted, "That is a good smell. That is Egyptian butter."⁹² Another witness also claimed that the next day, he found clothes tainted with blood in the street, and natives told him it was "Egyptian butter."⁹³ Although the appearance of butter as a symbol of discontent during the uprising is neither explained by witnesses nor further investigated during the legal proceedings, trade statistics suggest that the discontent may have been related to the sudden influx of a cheap imported product with no protection for domestic industries. Just as increased competition on the world market after the war transformed the cigarette industry and resulted in a wave of dismissals, so did the dumping of cheap imported goods into Alexandria harm domestic production that had been protected from foreign competition during the war.

The ability of European and Levantine Christian merchants in Alexandria to suddenly begin importing cheap foreign goods after the war widened the socioeconomic gap between workers and the petite bourgeoisie. The records of the uprising thus reveal that many petit bourgeois Europeans were walking around Alexandria at this time with a significant amount of money in their pockets while workers were losing their sources of livelihood. For example, a Greek baker claimed that he was robbed of 51 pounds while walking home during the uprising, an Italian furniture maker claimed that he was robbed of 39 pounds and gold jewelry, and a Greek coffee shop owner claimed that he was robbed of 51 pounds.⁹⁴ In contrast to this, workers like ‘Abd al-Rāziq were making 25 cents a day when they were fortunate enough to find work.⁹⁵

⁹² *Minutes of Proceedings*, 82.

⁹³ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 93.

⁹⁴ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 93, 99 and 105.

⁹⁵ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 287.

The uneven movement of foreign goods into early interwar Alexandria thus resulted in increased capitalist exploitation and a widening gap between workers and the petite bourgeoisie, sparking widespread anger and discontent among workers.

The influx of commodities into Alexandria after the war was also accompanied by the renewed mobility of Mediterranean migrants, which had negative consequences for native sex workers. As discussed in Chapter 1, although Levantine Christian and Jewish refugees were allowed entry into Alexandria during the war, the British Army's monopolization of shipping routes destroyed the usual channels of Mediterranean migration. The resumption of trade after the war thus brought large numbers of Mediterranean migrants into Alexandria. According to Egyptian port statistics, 10,227 Greek, 14,565 Italian, and 5,989 French passengers landed at the port of Alexandria in 1920.⁹⁶ During this same year, over one-third of licensed sex workers in Alexandria were foreigners, and the vast majority of them were Greek, Italian and French.⁹⁷ The effect that this movement of foreign bodies had on the native sex trade in Alexandria was similar to the effect that imported goods had on workers in other industries. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the influx of refugees into Alexandria during this period further exacerbated the strain on the local sex industry. Witness testimonies thus frequently mention that native sex workers played a major role in the May 1921 uprisings, and some witnesses even claimed that the violence between natives and Europeans began when a native man attempted to steal gold

⁹⁶ See Ministry of Finance, *Annual Return of Shipping*, 9. Due to the fact that the census was only taken once every decade, these port statistics are the most useful indicators of demographic change in 1920.

⁹⁷ Annual statistics for the Alexandria City Police show that there were 1,670 licensed sex workers in Alexandria in 1920, and 608 of them were from foreign nationalities. Of the 608, 183 were Greek, 178 were Italian, and 116 were French. By 1924, the percentage of foreign women in the licensed sex trade had increased to over 40%. See police statistics reported in League of Nations, *Report of the Special Body of Experts*, 64.

bracelets from the arm of a Greek sex worker.⁹⁸ The greater freedom of mobility and visibility granted to European sex workers in early interwar Alexandria contributed to the increased capitalist exploitation of native sex workers, which in turn contributed to the rise of sex trafficking and the murder of independent sex workers. In this sense, the displacement of native sex workers was similar to the displacement of factory workers, as both were due to renewed capitalist penetration after the war.

The consequences of European migration into Alexandria after the war and the widening socioeconomic gap between workers and the petite bourgeoisie had a negative impact on the ability of native workers to secure housing. While the districts of al-Labbān, al-‘Aṭṭārīn and al-Manshiyya had long been mixed in terms of both race and class, with European shopkeepers living in close proximity to native workers, the legal proceedings of both the serial murder case and the uprising suggest that there was a process of gentrification after the war which was displacing native workers. The records show that native workers in these districts were frequently subleasing rooms in a single apartment, resulting in extremely crowded living spaces. These apartments were usually waqf endowments, which in Islamic law is property that is supposed to be used for charitable purposes. Thus, rather than renting an apartment directly from a landlord, Sakina subleased a room from the original tenant, even when she was living with a husband or a lover. Shortly before Sakina and her roommates were evicted from their apartment in October 1920, their landlord attempted to double their rent, and Sakina refused to pay.⁹⁹ After the eviction, the landlord renovated the apartment building with the intention of renting it to an

⁹⁸ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 60.

⁹⁹ Malaf Qadayyat Raya wi Sakina, 717.

Italian family that wanted both floors of the building, despite the fact that the building was a waqf endowment that should have been earmarked for the poor.¹⁰⁰ As Ilbert explains in *Alexandrie*, many waqf endowments in Alexandria were not properly registered, which meant that waqf managers were able to evade state regulation.¹⁰¹ This likely contributed to popular anger over the gentrification of property that was commonly considered waqf but not subject to regulation.

This process of displacement is also apparent in the records of the uprising, which show that while native workers were crowded into cramped living spaces, middle-class families of Greek, Italian and Levantine Christian descent were renting two-story homes in the same neighborhood.¹⁰² Many of the middle-class families that were targeted during the uprising were unfamiliar to the participants, indicating that they were new to the neighborhood. The records thus suggest that as middle-class newcomers were moving into these low-income districts, native workers were becoming increasingly displaced. The rapid pace of European migration into Alexandria after the war was placing a strain on housing and resources, pushing native workers into makeshift homes on the outskirts of their communities.¹⁰³ It is therefore not surprising that immediately before the uprising on May 20, 1921, newspapers in Alexandria reported that demonstrators in al-Labbān stormed the Ministry of Awqāf, the government agency that was

¹⁰⁰ ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Serdāb al-Mūmisāt*, 63.

¹⁰¹ Ilbert, *Alexandrie*, 509 - 510.

¹⁰² A number of witness testimonies stated that when Europeans fired shots from their second-floor balconies, natives would respond by setting the home on fire, indicating that the family occupied both stories. See, for example, the testimony of Youssuf Bassbouss in *Minutes of Proceedings*, 76 - 77.

¹⁰³ Minutes of Alexandria Municipal Council meetings from 1920 show that makeshift homes called hishash had grown rapidly during this period. See Ville d’Alexandrie, Séance de la Commission Municipale du 9 Juin 1920, Maṭbū‘āt Section of Egyptian National Archives.

responsible for regulating the uses of waqf endowments.¹⁰⁴ The uprising was a struggle against both the economic and physical displacement caused by the penetration of bodies and goods into the city that was known as the heart of colonial modernity in Egypt.

While situating the records of the serial murder case in the context of the uprisings reveals that workers had common grievances against the state and the petite bourgeoisie irrespective of race or nation, it also reveals that the structure of the international political economy precluded class solidarity. In the May 1921 uprising, while native workers attacked European shops and residents, Greek workers also attacked Egyptian shops and residents.¹⁰⁵ Although such details reinforce the working-class character of the uprising, they also suggest that class and nation were inseparable at this historical moment. Europeans in Alexandria exercised a tremendous amount of privilege not only because of British colonialism and the capitulations, but more importantly because Alexandria's porous boundaries enabled them to move freely through the city, take over housing that was intended for the poor, and import large quantities of foreign goods that few natives could afford at that time. These class privileges were grounded in both racial privilege and the privilege of Allied military and industrial dominance. The new international political economy that emerged out of World War I made control over national borders the basis of economic protection. This postwar moment of growing class consciousness was thus simultaneously a moment of growing national consciousness.

It was also for this reason that Alexandria's longstanding claims to local sovereignty were becoming rapidly obsolete. While the fiercely independent European communities of the port

¹⁰⁴ See "Muḏāhara," *al-Ahālī*.

¹⁰⁵ *Minutes of Proceedings*, 198.

city had always posed a challenge to the centralizing efforts of the colonial regime, the Alexandrian notables who had controlled the city through the Municipal Council in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries no longer had the means to solve the city's social, political and fiscal crises in the wake of the war.¹⁰⁶ Egyptian nationalists in Cairo closely followed events in Alexandria, and the Cairo-based newspaper, *al-Ahrām*, paid special attention to the serial murders, the uprisings, and the municipality's growing financial problems, which were largely due to the need for massive rebuilding projects to address the effects of the war on Alexandria's economy and infrastructure.¹⁰⁷ Shortly after the approval of a new town planning scheme,¹⁰⁸ Egyptian nationalists won the initial battle for cosmopolitan Alexandria, for the city's municipal council went bankrupt and came under the control of the central government in Cairo.¹⁰⁹ This battle for cosmopolitan Alexandria would continue throughout the interwar period between various social, political and economic actors, including workers and a growing middle class, Egyptian nationalists and colonial officials, and native versus European communities. While nationalists sought to win this battle by taking control of the state, for most workers, their only hope of winning was by fooling the state.

¹⁰⁶ See Ilbert, "A Certain Sense of Citizenship," 28 - 29.

¹⁰⁷ See "Māliyyat Baladayyat al-Iskandirayya [The Finances of the Alexandria Municipality]," *al-Ahrām*, December 14, 1920. See also Ville d'Alexandrie, Séance de la Commission Municipale du 3 Mars 1920, 5, Maṭbū'āt Section of Egyptian National Archives.

¹⁰⁸ McLean, *City of Alexandria Town Planning Scheme*, 3 - 4. For further discussion of this town planning scheme, see Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁹ Ilbert, "A Certain Sense of Citizenship," 32.

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