

“Even if the Sons of Rum are not like Him” The Spatial and Temporal Journey of a Late 19th Century Egyptian Song

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This paper follows the material and discursive circulation of the Egyptian popular song “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” as it traveled from the urban context to Upper Egypt throughout the 19th century. The song narrates the farewell of a mother to her son recruited to war, and her helpless attempt to save him. I explore how centuries-old local forms of mobility enacted by authors and performers intersected with the infrastructural changes in transportation under British colonization increasingly since the third quarter of the 19th century. Additionally, by reflecting on the *long durée* of the song’s circulation and performative replication, I investigate the conti-

nities within the military social infrastructure throughout the century, and argue that the ongoing exploitation of Upper Egyptian soldiers helps explain the endurance of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya’s” social relevance. I thus provide a case for the study of material and social infrastructures as interrelated realms of analysis, specifically with respect to the different implications of the material and social mobilities that my analysis uncovers.

Keywords: transportation infrastructures, mobility, Egypt, army, popular culture, 19th century, song

Introduction

“Oh, if only we had escaped / During the month of conscription, to then come back,”¹ (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 170) laments a mother to her son recruited to war in “Fī-l-Jihādiyya,” a 19th century Upper Egyptian popular song narrating an episode of conscription in the Egyptian army.² “The recruiter was happy and gave him his own clothes / Even if the sons of Rum are not like him,” the mother continues and, in her helpless attempt to save him, exclaims: “Oh son, hide the rosiness of your cheeks / The Cheikh el-Béléd marked down: good for service” (Maspero 172). The narrative of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” is strikingly connected to the history of the Egyptian army that Muhammad ‘Ali, the Ottoman Governor of Egypt, founded in 1820-1821, which was to affect the lives of the thousands of Egyptian *fallāḥīn* (peasants) recruited into it. Known as *niḏām-ī cedīd*, the new army relied on an unprecedented process of massive conscription: in 1839, for example, 140,000 recruits were pulled from a population of about five million. As the Egyptian historian Khaled Fahmy shows in his book *All the Pasha’s Men*, two characteristics of the *niḏām-ī cedīd* were the active modes of resistance that the recruits and their families devised in order to avoid conscription; and the divide existing between the

Egyptian soldiers and their Ottoman (mainly Turco-Circassian) Turkish-speaking officers, also referred to as *Rūm*. In the lines quoted above, these two elements emerge clearly: a mother marks the difference between her recruited son and the sons of *Rūm* conscripting him, and implores him to flee the town and disguise his health in order not to be marked down as *good for service*.

Yet this song was not collected in the aftermath of Muhammad 'Ali's rule, nor in later decades of the Egyptian army's history - which, in 1882, fell under direct control of the British - but rather at the turn of the 20th century, published by the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846-1916) in the volume *Chansons populaires recueillies dans la haute-Egypte de 1900 a 1914 pendant les inspections du service des antiquités*. Still, the song's narrative, which depicts a scenario of resistance to massive conscription, is unlikely to refer to the historical moment in which it was collected, considering that the British-controlled army - which was, by then, at least twenty years in the making - only recruited one out of five hundred Egyptians (Steevens 12). Rather, "Fī-l-Jihādiyya" seems more likely to refer to the context of the Egyptian army since the implementation of the *niḡām-ı cedīd*, although we can only speculate as to

which specific phase or under which rule the narrative is set - and, consequentially, on when it was composed.

Maspero's claim that the song "had been composed by *poètes de ville* and was not popular in origin, but became such at the hands of *chanteurs professionnels*" (Maspero 3, my emphasis) further supports the hypothesis of an earlier authorship of "Fī-l-Jihādiyya." Based on Maspero's indications, it is thus possible to identify three stages in the song's journey: the text was first authored in the urban context; it then traveled by way of professional singers to reach Upper Egypt earlier than 1902; here it was finally performed by semi-professionals and *fallāḡīn* when Maspero collected it (Maspero 149). In this article, I thus follow the movement in space and time of "Fī-l-Jihādiyya" through its three phases, while simultaneously surveying contemporary shifts in the army's social infrastructure. In doing so, on the one hand I characterize the infrastructural development in transportation Egypt underwent throughout the second half of the 19th century as significant to both the apparently separate realms of military history and of cultural production, and examine how this related to preexisting modes of circulation. Only by reflecting on the different mobilities brought about by the performance and practice of modernity

(Mitchell), whether these entailed shifts in the circulation of cultural tokens, or the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of soldiers, one can attempt to grasp the multiple implications of infrastructural development. From a theoretical point of view, I therefore provide a case for the study of material and social infrastructures as interrelated realms of analysis, specifically with respect to the different implications of mobility that my analysis uncovers: mobility as spatial and material acts (in the case of the song's circulation and the conscripts' imposed traveling), as well as social positioning (with respect to the condition of immobility of Upper Egyptian soldiers within the military infrastructure). On the other hand, I examine the song's narration of conscription and desertion, in particular through the notion of *otherness* that the mother articulates in relation to the *Rūmi* recruiter.³ I argue that the *long durée* of the song's circulation depended not only on the conditions for its replication at the hands of a variety of relatively mobile performers, but also on the enduring cultural significance of its narrative with respect to the social divide characterizing the army's infrastructure. As a historical intervention, this article thus offers an account of the military experience in 19th century Egypt that highlights the continuities throughout the history of the Egyptian

and British-controlled army throughout the century, in turn allowing us to uncover the overlap between social categorizations in the context of military life with the development of explicitly nationalist claims at the turn of the century.

Before turning to the core of my analysis, it should be noted that, as “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” moved from the urban center to Upper Egypt, where it was in turn collected and published by Maspero, it underwent a series of transformations that indicate the potential for iteration of this text. First, the fact that the Egyptologist had his secretary “M. Nasri Nasr, Syrian of origins [who] received a European education in a Jesuit institution” not only transcribe the Arabic text of a variety of songs – including “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” – performed by “various singers” during his travels to Upper Egypt, but also “rectify their linguistic and stylistic mistakes [while] maintaining the provincial inflection,” inevitably entailed a partial modification of the text (Maspero 2).⁴

Second, Maspero’s publication of the song represents a case of orientalist repurposing and commodification of stereotyped local folkloric tradition for the consumption of the European public. For example, in the introduction to the collection, the Egyptologist cautions the reader not to “be scandalized” by the songs’ “incorrect and bizarre parts,” and

stated that he acted as “a simple intermediary between the people of the Said [Upper Egypt] and the European reader” (Maspero 4). Maspero’s collection is thus exemplary of what Edward Said identified as the process of schematization and generalization through which *the other* is reduced to serve the cultural and political objectives of European domination (Said, “The Scope of Orientalism”) – in this case consisting of not only Maspero’s potential financial profit from the publication of this allegedly authentic piece of Egyptian popular culture, but also of the fact that he collected the song during an archeological campaign sponsored by the French government in line with European political, economic, and cultural pursuits in the region.⁵ Therefore, although this article specifically focuses on the circulation of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” within Egypt, this text embarked in a second, transnational journey just as it left the country as part of this collection. Finally, it should be noted that Maspero was trained as an Egyptologist and was not a student of the Egyptian contemporary society (Cordier). For example, he does not mention where and how he obtained the contextual information he provides about the temporality and circulation of the song. Therefore, the data he provides need to be supported by addi-

tional research, which I try to offer throughout the paper.

Despite the song’s journey and the layers of transformation this entailed, the narrative of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” seems to have been relatively widespread in Upper Egypt in the late 19th century. In particular, Georges Legrain (1865-1917) – a French Egyptologist serving as *Directeur des travaux du service des antiquités* in Karnak, Upper Egypt – published in 1914 a version of the text that he titled “The Mother of the Recruited” that is undoubtedly the same as the one in Maspero’s collection.⁶ Ultimately, in spite of the apparently limited scope of its narrative, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” prompts a complex set of questions concerning its spatiotemporal journey, in relation to both the coordinates of its material circulation across the country and long-term reproduction as a cultural product; and the social implications of its discourse in relation to forced mobility under conscription.

First Leg: Authorship of the Song, and the Introduction of the *Nizām-ı Cedīd*

The text of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” was composed by *poètes de ville*, or urban poets, Maspero reports (Maspero 3). The fact that the song is a *mawwāl* – a subgroup of the lyrical song – supports this statement. In fact, the *mawwāl* was characterized by

a highly structured and detailed narrative, a regular rhyming schema, and a clear sequencing of scenes, all elements that suggest a professional authorship.⁷ Moreover, this genre was often used to comment on contemporary and recent events, in this case the experience of conscription in the Egyptian army.⁸ “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” is also immediately distinguishable from the other less structured songs, also included in Maspero’s collection – for the most part work songs narrating activities in the fields, on the archeological excavation sites, or at the mill – characterized, for example, by the interaction between a lead singer and a chorus in order to keep the rhythm of the work. The term *poète*, employed by Maspero to identify the authorship of the song, was systematically used by 19th and early 20th century European Orientalists to refer to urban⁹ – i.e. Cairene or Alexandrian –¹⁰ composers and performers of the genre of the lyrical song. The French physician Antoine Barthélémy Clot, known as Clot Bey, writing in 1840, employed the term *poète* when reporting that

[t]here are in Cairo some *poètes titrés* [lit: official poets] who use to compose a song every month. These romances are sung during public festivals and

private reunions, and it does not take long for common people to learn them (Clot 74).

The British Orientalist and translator Edward William Lane reported that, in early 20th century “Cairo and other towns,” the reciters, of which “the most numerous class is that of the persons called ‘sho’arà’ (poets)” usually performed in coffee shops, where the audience “sit upon stools or benches made of palmsticks; most of them with the pipe in hand; some sipping their coffee; and all highly amused [...] with the lively and dramatic manner of the narrator” (Lane, *An Account of the Manners* 55). In addition to this group, who composed and performed its own songs, also known as *fannān* (Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads* 50), there were in the cities the “Áláteeyeh” (Lane 316) both instrumental and vocal performers, whose talent – and, consequently, income – depended on their ability to improvise and embellish the songs by means of their virtuosity with rhymes, rhythm, and modulation. They often ended up modifying the text itself, building up to sizeable differences (Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads* 52).

Through the voice of an urban poet or performer, the mother of our Upper Egyptian soldier speaks. In the song, she

repeatedly offers advice to the son about how to avoid conscription, such as the one reported in the excerpts that open this article. Her advice is twofold: leaving the town during the month of recruitment, and disguising his health in order not to be selected. As Fahmy notes in *All the Pasha’s Men*, with the implementation of the *nizām-ı cedīd* in 1820-21 the decision to leave the village during the period of conscription “was so widespread that entire villages were found completely abandoned” (Fahmy 100). This phenomenon was also corroborated by the fact that the Sheikh, the local authority in charge of recruiting peasants – “the Cheikh el-Béléd marked down: good for service” (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 172) – would sometimes “connive with the peasants instead of handing them to the authorities” (Fahmy 100) although this is not the case in the song. To contain the problem, and enforce the correct form of mobility that massive conscription entailed, Muhammad ‘Ali’s government began to compile registers of absconders, in line with the trend of increasing employment of “tools of standardization and compartmentalization” to which Fahmy refers as “inscribing reality” (Fahmy 109). A second way to avoid conscription was by disguising one’s health. The mother presents the trickery through the metonymy, a figure of speech that

refers to an object by employing something associated to it in terms of meaning, in this case common oral-formulaic epithets – such as the rosiness of the cheeks, or the whiteness of the hands (Slyomovics 276) to indicate a much harsher reality. In fact, the most common means of self-maiming in order to be declared medically unfit consisted of “chopping off the index finger, pulling the front teeth and/or putting rat poison in one’s eye” (Fahmy 102). Interestingly enough, it was not uncommon for women to help men maim themselves, as it happens in the song, where it is the mother who actively presents the son with this suggestion. Absconding and maiming were not uncommon in Upper Egypt (Fahmy 260) – one of the regions most affected by conscription; the first Egyptian recruits were in fact Upper Egyptians.¹¹ Muhammad ‘Ali even ordered that the mothers and wives helping their men with maiming be “hanged at village entrances” (Fahmy 130). These practices of resistance did not disappear with the end of Muhammad ‘Ali’s reign, as cases of self-mutilation continued to be recorded under the reigns of his successors (Fahmy 15, 25, 43). For example, in 1877 – right before the implementation of the British-controlled army – we are still told that the draftees resemble “gangs

of apparent convicts, chained together, and driven by soldiers” (Dunn 43).¹² Therefore, both in the song as well as historically, mobility emerged as a potential for safety as opposed to the immobility imposed by recruitment. As the mother of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” was not just impotently bidding farewell to her son at the station,¹³ also the conscripts in the Egyptian army and their families were not mere subjects of imposed violence. On the contrary, the coexistence of these alternative discourses of safety as resistance to forced mobility through fleeing marks Upper Egyptian *fallāḥīn* not as a homogeneous and static category, but as multifaceted and actively engaging – discursively and practically – with and against the army’s authoritarian power. Although originally produced in the city and circulated by professionals, the Upper Egyptian *fallāḥīn* who performatively replicated this song were not merely receiving it, but also creatively employing and circulating a personally experienced narrative of resistance to conscription. Let us now leave the city and follow “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” as it traveled across the country, while at the same time tracking contemporary shifts in the history of the Egyptian army.

The Long Run: Material Mobilities and Social Immobility

The apparent enclosure of the urban context – as portrayed by the Cairene travelogues mentioned hitherto – was in reality looser, and often characterized by the coexistence and interaction of urban and rural professionals, embodied by the figure of the *chanteur de profession*, or professional singer (Maspero 3). As the term itself suggests, they were professional artists who made a living by performing in disparate contexts, both urban and rural. It was at their hands, Maspero tells us, that “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” circulated from the urban context to Upper Egypt during the second half of the 19th century. Professional singers had been traveling from town to town to perform in public festivals and country fairs for centuries (Reynolds 53) – tellingly, they were often referred to as “itinerant performers”, i.e. “full-time professionals [who were] almost bound to take the road” (21, 41). Nevertheless, their degree of mobility remarkably increased during the decades under inquiry. In fact, especially since the reign of Isma‘il Pasha (r. 1863–1879), Egypt underwent a process of substantial infrastructural development. In particular, the development of transportation infrastructures – the most significant being the railway, but also the new network of paved roads and the recently

nationalized steamships – gradually fostered the mobility of people, news, and products in terms of rapidity and affordability. Isma‘il’s administration extended the mileage of railway lines – which, in 1876, led as far south as contemporary Sudan – from 500 to around 1,100 miles (Cole 112). It also implemented this infrastructure in terms of speed, to the point that already in 1862 the distance between Cairo and Alexandria could be covered in five hours (Barak 56).

Along with thousands of peasants, professional singers could now take third-class coaches that began to “constitute the largest source of income in the passenger section” (Barak 86). There were different contexts that made it economically convenient for professional singers to move between the city and the countryside, or from town to town. On the occasion of the three annual harvests – which used to time the course of the year before the implementation of the High Aswan Dam – “itinerant poets [...] entertained the harvest workers in the fields during rest breaks” (Slyomovics 7). Additionally, the wealthy would hire professional singers and instrumental groups, and pay their travel expenses from the city to the countryside, or vice versa, to come and perform for them and their entourage (Danielson 28). Still, despite the enhanced mobility

allowed to professional singers by infrastructural development, the railway system also developed along with significant inequalities in terms of usability and accessibility. In fact, the network was not originally conceived, nor designed, to serve the needs of the majority of the population: for example, until 1870, there were no printed timetables, as initially the trains would simply wait in Alexandria and Suez for the arrival of people and merchandize via steamer before leaving for Cairo (Barak 54).

The temporal and spatial coordinates of “Fi-l-Jihādiyya’s” circulation at the hands of professional performers from the urban centers to Upper Egypt uniquely expose the ways in which recently expanded transportation modes and preexisting forms of mobility overlapped and interacted, inviting us to problematize the kind of deterministic assumption that causally links infrastructural development and the enhanced circulation of cultural forms. On the one hand, the fact that the song was authored in the urban context, but collected in Upper Egypt testifies to the high degree of mobility of professional performers. On the other hand, that the only versions of the song ever recorded were collected in Upper Egypt demonstrates the geographical boundedness and his-

torical endurance of local networks of cultural expression.

As “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” was traveling from the urban centers to the south along with itinerant performers, the newly extended railroad network also functioned as one of the central infrastructures to the increase of troops’ mobility since at least the middle years of the century (Dunn 24). Under the Egyptian army, the percentage of Egyptian¹⁴ conscripts did not remain stable, but shifted along an oscillatory trend. Yet, overall – with the exception of the last decade of Muhammad ‘Ali’s rule, and the reign of Sa‘id (r. 1854-1863) – the ratio of conscripts continued to be relatively high, especially when compared to the value in the British-Egyptian army.¹⁵ In fact, since 1882, the volume of conscripts radically decreased and remained rather stable, even during the epidemic of cholera in 1883 (Arthur 52). At the turn of the century, the British-controlled army counted around 20,000 men, with a ratio of around one out of five hundred Egyptian conscripts (Steevens 12). If, with respect to the ratio of conscription, the situation changed consistently, the same cannot be said for the positioning of the foreign element in its highest ranks. Even though the internal composition of this group shifted, especially with the establishment of the British-controlled army, the privileged position of

non-Egyptians remained a constant in the history of the army throughout the second half and the turn of the century – as well as in the early 20th century, although this exceeds the temporality under inquiry. In particular, even under British rule, Turco-Circassian and Albanian soldiers continued to receive a preferential treatment with respect to native Egyptians, as I illustrate below.

Not surprisingly, a core element of the narrative of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” is the discourse around *otherness*. This is expressed through the process that leads the son to be gradually appropriated by the recruiter and the Pasha, stripped – literally and metaphorically – of his identity, and turned into an unrecognizable *other*. A core index of *otherness* in the song is the term “sons of Rum.” The mother repeats twice that “the sons of Rum are not like him” (Maspero, “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” 170). Originally the Persian and Turkish word for the Byzantine Empire and its inhabitants (Babinger), since the 16th the term was employed in Ottoman Egypt to refer to foreign mercenaries coming from Rumelia (Crecelius), also known as “Rum oghlani.”¹⁶ With the implementation of the *nizām-ı cedīd*, the meaning of the term continued to indicate the foreign, Ottoman (prevalently Turco-Circassian, but also, to a minor extent, Albanian) Turkish-speaking mem-

bers who occupied the highest ranks in the army *vis-à-vis* Egyptian soldiers.¹⁷ In *State and Society in Mid-nineteenth-century Egypt*, the historian Ehud Toledano labeled this phenomenon as “the social divide”; however, the scholar’s categorization does not completely adhere to the one expressed in the song. According to Toledano, not only the army, but also Egyptian society at large, was characterized by a divide between a small powerful Ottoman-Egyptian élite versus the politically and economically subordinated majority. For Toledano, the demarcation line was primarily a social and linguistic one: the Ottoman-Egyptian élite spoke Turkish, while the rest of the population used Arabic, along with the specific languages of the smaller religious and/or ethnic groups – such as Christians, Jews, Italians, Kurdish, and Greeks (Fahmy 151). Yet, as Fahmy rightly points out, at least within the army this divide did not only categorize soldiers in terms of language and class, but also as “ethnically different” (Fahmy 268). In fact, the organization of the *nizām-ı cedīd* explicitly distinguished between *evlad-ı Arab*, i.e. Egyptians; and foreigners, for the most part Turco-Circassian. For example, of the already few Egyptians promoted, none could go beyond the rank of captain. This could lead to the paradoxical situation in which

even an Ottoman Turkish-speaking prisoner obtained better promotions than an Egyptian soldier could (Fahmy 246-7). Fahmy’s characterization of the divide is closer to the discourse voiced in the song, in which *otherness* is not expressed in terms of language, nor as a mere question of authoritarian power, but through indexes of socio-cultural difference, such as clothing, and the term *Rūm*. With the securing of Muhammad ‘Ali’s dynasty, the structural feature of social immobility for Egyptian soldiers crystallized and endured into the reign of all three successors.¹⁸

‘Abbas Pasha (r. 1848-1854) maintained a personal direct control over promotion, favoring his personal Mamluks along with recent Albanian immigrants (Dunn 16). At the same time, Egyptian soldiers were often employed as a reservoir of cheap labor, officially conscripted for twelve years, and paid less despite inflation. Under the rule of Sa‘id the situation seemed to change, as the ruler opened higher ranks to Egyptian Copts and *fallāḥīn*. However, this policy – along with a general trend of drastic cuts affecting the system of military schools, the officials’ pensions, and doubled with short-lived and unsubstantial policies mostly aiming at acquiring an international resonance, such as the Mexican campaign (Dunn 26) – was not to last, and with Isma‘il the divide

became even sharper. Foreign mercenaries, especially American, French, and British, increasingly joined the enduring Turkish-speaking element of Turks, Circassians, and Albanians at the top of the military hierarchy. The situation became more and more frustrating not only for the soldiers conscripted in the lower ranks, but also for highly trained Egyptian colonels – still the highest rank they could aspire to – who increasingly lamented the fact that “[t]he practice in Egypt was to discriminate by race [...] promotions, decoration and rewards went to Circassians” (Le Gassick 28). Such a haphazard use of meritocracy – officials were not even required to be literate – explains in part why officials’ quality in the Egyptian army “was sadly deficient” (Le Gassick 50) and might be one of the reasons behind the failure of Isma‘il’s expansionism, which was put to an end in 1875-1876, when in the Gura campaign – nowadays Kenya – the army lost nearly 14,000 men and 10,000-12,000 animals (Le Gassick 150). The enduring existence, within the army, of a powerful and foreign contingent, I argue, helps us make sense of the performatively reproduced currency of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya’s” discourse around *otherness*. In fact, despite the different mediations entailed by the text’s circulation, as well as its shifting relation to the “specific environ-

ment [through which it was] individualized and given stylistic shape” (Bakhtin 276) in accordance with “real-life experiences [and] the people’s shared understanding of words, tones, and performances” (Ghunaym and Yusuf 70), “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” demonstrates that a discourse of *otherness* continued to be meaningful for articulating the experience of Egyptian soldiers in relation to foreign elements, particularly as we turn to the context of direct British colonization.

Finish Line? Cultural Endurance of the Song at the Turn of the Century

Various groups were involved in the circulation of the song at the local level. Semi-professional performers, usually trained in reciting the Quran, often included in their repertoire other genres, such as the *mawwāl*, and performed during public and private events. For example, in the late 19th century, al-Sheikh Ibrahim al-Sayyid al-Baltaji, the father of Umm Kulthum (1904-1975) – the prominent Egyptian singer – and the imam of a small village of the Delta, used to augment his income by singing at weddings and other celebrations both in his and neighboring villages (Danielson 22).¹⁹ Moreover, peasants used to sing not only during their work in the fields – a context in which the *mawwāl* was unlikely to be performed –

but also on the occasion of local country fairs, such as at the end of the harvest season as a form of collective singing (Mustafa 49). For example, Maspero reports,

every year, the habitants of Akhmim and of the villages nearby get all together at the beginning of the valley, and camp there for three or four days. At night they light big fires, sing, and drink (Maspero et al. 193).

In spite of the enhanced interconnectedness of urban and rural contexts due to the aforementioned development of transportation infrastructures in the second half of the century, differences in the modes of performance seem not only to have endured in the decades under inquiry, but also well into the 20th century. In 1922, for example, we are told that “[i]n the countryside the singing is deeper, more severe; the notes are sustained, and follow without particular interval [while] in the cities the professionals share a real passion for embellishment” (Lavignac 2798). The testimony of Victor Loret, a French traveler writing in 1885 about Upper Egyptian folk music – who reported the melody of a few Upper Egyptian lyrical songs in Western pentagram – confirms that the songs were mainly monotonic

(Loret 322). Moreover, when describing musical performance in Upper Egypt, the scholar ‘Abd al-Hadi Sanfawi reports that “the majority of the tunes here [are] simple in composition and strong in expression” (Sanfawi 46). The endurance of local performative canons further indicates that shifts in transportation infrastructures did not translate automatically into a radical reconfiguration of local mobility, modes of economic gain, and artistic practices. Rather, itinerant and local performers actively exploited the benefits of the increased cross-country mobility while continuing to rely on local networks and venues of artistic production. Moreover, the co-presence, in the *mawwāl* “Fī-l-Jihādiyya,” of both the distinct elements testifying to its professional authorship in the urban context discussed in the first section, and of the specificities of Upper Egyptian pronunciation and performative styles – which emerge from Maspero’s transcription of the text,²⁰ and are supported by the ethnomusicologist investigations of Upper Egyptian popular musical traditions reported above – sheds light on the potential for iterability of this text as it traveled in both space and time. Still, it was not only the possibility for the physical circulation and diffusion of “Fī-l-Jihādiyya” at the hands of a variety of performers that ensured its relatively high

assimilation into local culture.²¹ We also need to reflect on the reasons behind the endurance of the song’s cultural significance, in particular in relation to the notion of *otherness* introduced earlier. In 1881, the ‘Urabi revolt began with a military demonstration that condemned – in addition to the Anglo-French financial and economic predominance, and the rule of Tawfiq (r. 1879-1892) – the discriminatory policies in favor of the Turco-Circassians, and against native soldiers. At the end of the ‘Urabi revolt, the Turco-Circassians reacquired their privileged role in the army also when, with the beginning of British occupation, the British-controlled army was implemented. A British report from the early 20th century, discussing the recent reforms of the new army, claimed that if in the past Egyptian conscripts “would cut off their fingers or more often sacrifice an ophthalmic eye [now, under the British-controlled army] they assumed the correct military swagger, and [...] enjoyed their drill, like a new toy, and even took to drilling each other out of parade hours” (Arthur 176). However, this hardly seems to have been the case. For example, in the reports of Romolo Gessi, an Italian officer serving under General Charles Gordon in Sudan, we read that the Egyptian soldiers were “poorly trained to the military life and discipline” (Zaccaria

117). The very same drills that the natives conscripted seem to have enjoyed that much were not even in their own language, since they remained in Turkish until 1920 (Dunn 51).

The situation did not improve for the Egyptians aspiring to advance in their military career either. In fact, the highest rank accessible to them remained that of colonel (Arthur 177), and in any event, no British officer could have a superior native officer in his corps (Steevens 19). At the same time, the number of British officers was increased, and the Turco-Circassian group maintained its privilege – most non-British officers were in fact Turkish, Circassian, or Albanian (Steevens 17). Even at lower ranks, Turkish soldiers seemed to have experienced a different treatment than their Egyptian counterpart: in 1884, Lord Kitchener complained about the fact that “[t]he Turkish soldiers won’t work; I have recommended £300 to be expended on native labor” (Arthur 82). The divide between discriminated Egyptians and powerful foreigners – mostly Turco-Circassian and Albanian and, increasingly since 1882, British – continued to characterize the army, fostering the dissatisfaction of the former, which erupted, even if not successfully, during the ‘Urabi movement in 1881-1882. The divide affected not only the ambitious Egyptians who, such as

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colonel ‘Urabi, aspired to advance in their military career, but also the Egyptian recruits, who were exposed to discriminatory treatment, such as being employed as a free-labor resource.

Conclusion

As I have tried to illustrate, the differing effects of 19th century development in transportation infrastructures, the implementation of a conscription-based army, and the endurance of inequalities within its social infrastructure radiated in often divergent waves as these permeated and modified the Egyptian social taxonomy. Unprecedented possibilities for mobility that could increase the financial viability of musical performers simultaneously enforced the traveling of thousands of *fallāḥīn* whose material mobility did not translate into a social one. The local social networks that guaranteed the embeddedness of popular musical rituals and the large diffusion of “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” in Upper Egypt did not generally suffice in guaranteeing the safety of their young conscripts, as in the case of our protagonist. Ultimately, the unexpected ramifications of the journey of “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” demonstrate both, in terms of methodology, the inevitable entanglement of sociocultural and infrastructural processes and, as a historical intervention, the high degree of inequality

on which the project of modernity was based and implemented. Therefore, when Maspero collected the song at the turn of the century, it did not exist in a vacuum. More than half a century after the implementation of the *niẓām-ı cedīd*, “Fi-l-Jihādiyya’s” discourse around an oppressive *other* was still very much current. In conceiving of repetition as an occasion for continuous potential resignification, I suggest that, by the turn of the century, although apparently *outdated* in its content, “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” never ceased to be meaningful, not only as a way of remembering a tragic past event, but also of commenting on an enduring present in which the means of power were still in the hands of those who were “not like him” (Maspero, “Fi-l-Jihādiyya” 170). It is by no means coincidental that, some ten years after Maspero published the song, national claims were reverberating in the country employing a discourse of *otherness* that was very akin to the one we find in “Fi-l-Jihādiyya.” The history of nationalism was also rooted in the long-term social divide of the army, as this was not only experienced firsthand, but also counted and recounted throughout the century.

Notes

¹ The song's title may be translated as "the recruitment," or "the place of recruitment," while in Maspero's collection this is translated as "Au Sujet Du Recrutement," - "the recruit." All translations are by the author, unless otherwise indicated. For Arabic terms reported in secondary sources, I maintain the original transliteration.

² The song consists of twenty-four rhyming couplets, and belongs to the genre of the *mawwāl*, a subgroup of the lyrical song. For an in-depth analysis of the genre of the *mawwāl* (Cachia, "The Egyptian Mawwāl").

³ A detailed characterization of the term *Rūm* and of its evolution is offered in the following sections.

⁴ "Fī-l-Jihādiyya," although being in *fuṣṣḥā*, retains some vocabulary and pronunciations (which become explicit in the French transliteration of the text offered in the collection) that are typical of the Arabic spoken in Upper Egypt. For example, almost every *qāf* is written as a *jīm*, produced as the hard *g* sound that was, and still is, typical of the Upper Egyptian dialect. Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, the melody of the song was never recorded or noted down (Maspero, *Chansons Populaires* 2).

⁵ For an in-depth analysis of Maspero's archeological campaign, and of the songs performed during agricultural work and at the excavation sites that are included in the Egyptologist's collection see Anne Clément. "Rethinking "peasant consciousness" in colonial Egypt."

⁶ Legrain's version is useful as it offers additional contextual information. For example, if Maspero vaguely stated that the song was collected in Upper Egypt, Legrain specifically indicated Luxor as the site where the text was gathered. Finally, in his treatise Loret mentioned a song named "The daughter of the soldier," of which he only reported a few measures, without recording the text nor its translation. Collected in the same region, at the same time, and belonging to the same genre, Loret's song does not prove the existence of a third version of "Fī-l-Jihādiyya". Nevertheless, it confirms the existence and circulation of a narrative about the experience of war expressed through the lyrical song in Upper Egypt in the late 19th century.

⁷ See Jammal 290. For example, in "Fī-l-Jihādiyya," some ending words are modified in order to rhyme with the precedent or following line. This figure of speech, the paronomasia, was one of the core features of the *mawwāl*. For example, *al-wāḥa* (oasis) becomes in the song *alwāḥ* to rhyme with the following *wurāḥ*; *minīn* (from where) - turns into *minīh* to rhyme with the preceding *wārmīh*.

⁸ Significantly, in 1840, the French physician Antoine Barthélémy Clot collected, along with other lyrical songs performed in Cairo by urban poets, a piece that he titled "Song of a soldier," which describes the suffering of a young couple set apart when the man is conscripted and sent to Mecca. The song, which is set in the aftermath of Muhammad 'Alī's campaign within the Ottoman-Wahhabi war in the early 19th century, is very detailed and descriptive of the vicissitudes of the young soldier. Both "Fī-l-Jihādiyya" and "Song of a Soldier" narrate a real historical event: tellingly, both texts belong to the genre of the lyrical song, which was specifically employed to comment on

recent historical events. This fact suggests that, as "The song of the soldier" was commenting in 1840 on an event that happened few decades earlier "Fī-l-Jihādiyya" too was likely to have been composed in the aftermath of the historical events it narrates. Therefore, we can confirm Maspero's claim, and suggest that "Fī-l-Jihādiyya" was in fact composed prior to 1902 as belong to the *mawwāl* genre, often employed to comment on recent historical events.

⁹ To refer to itinerant professionals, discussed in the following section, the term usually employed was *chanteur* rather than *poète*.

¹⁰ Until the end of the 19th century, the urban population was concentrated in Cairo and, to a minor extent, Alexandria, while the majority of Egyptians lived in villages and few small towns (Toledano 254).

¹¹ At first, the *nizām-ī cedīd* recruited Sudanese slaves, until the decision was made to "gather soldiers from Upper Egypt". See the letter sent to Ahmed Pasha Tahrir, governor of Jirja, in Fahmy (89).

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→ ¹² Declaration of confederate diplomate Edwin de Leon in John P. Dunn (43).

¹³ Until the early eighties of the 19th century, the term *maḥaṭṭa* does not seem to have referred to a train station, but rather to a place where "the camel remains at the leash" or "where loads, &c., are put down, a place where one alights and abides [hence also] a place for unloading ships", which, in the case of "Fi-l-Jihādiyya", might indicate a space used for gathering and shipping soldiers, *ḥaṭṭa* (al-Bustani).

¹⁴ Although this is not the focus of the present analysis, we should mention that also Sudanese slaves continued to be employed in both the Egyptian army and, later, in the British-controlled army since 1882.

¹⁵ This and the following estimations are obtained by matching the data for the Egyptian population throughout the second half of the 19th century. It is important to notice that they are not reported to offer exact data, but to indicate a general trend. The percentage of Egyptian conscripted was around 1/100 in 1841; 1/60 under 'Abbas; 1/2400 under Sa'id; 1/80 under Isma'il. For an estimation of the Egyptian population throughout the second half of the 19th century (Panzac).

¹⁶ This term referred to the Turkish newcomers in the army (Winter 45).

¹⁷ At the same time, the term *Rūmi* started to refer more generally to foreignness beyond the realm of the army. In fact, Lane defines it as "those of the Lower Empire together with all the nations of Europe beside" (1193). For example, in the middle years of the 19th century, the Istanbul type architectural style was also known as *Rūmi*; in early 20th century Alexandria, Greek small shopkeepers were called *baqqal rumi* (Greek grocer) (Winter 45).

¹⁸ The first successor to Muhammad 'Ali was Ibrahim, who served for less than eight months.

¹⁹ Akhmim is a town of Upper Egypt on the right bank of the Nile.

²⁰ As mentioned in the introduction, almost every *qāf* is written as a *jīm*, produced as the hard *g* sound that was, and still is, typical of the Upper Egyptian dialect. The transliteration in the Latin alphabet provided by the Egyptologist confirms this pronunciation. For example, the verb *qāla* (he said) is rendered as *gāl*; *al-munaqqy* (the conscripted) as *al-menaggy*.

²¹ As indicated by the additional versions of the song collected by Legrain and Loret. See note 6.

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