On the Semicivilized

Coloniality, Finance, *and* Embodied Sovereignty *in* Cairo

JULIA ELYACHAR

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For Tomaž, Elijan, and Martin

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Like all books, this one is a collective endeavor that only authorial fiction puts under my name alone. My debts are of a length and depth impossible to capture here. I am first and foremost indebted to my ancestors who kept records of their life in Palestine as far back as 1500. I owe special thanks to my great-uncle Hai Elyachar for his work as archivist and family historian, and to my grandfather for the stories he passed on to me.

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me in figuring out what I wanted to say, how to say it, and how to put things together from start to finish, over multiple reworkings of this book in the course of more than four years. As an editor and writing coach, her range of skills is remarkable, and my gratitude knows no bounds. Here I also want to mark my good luck in having landed at Princeton, an institution with the resources to provide research funds for such essential editorial support. I wish every writer were so lucky as to have such an opportunity.

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INTRODUCTION

On the Move

I first heard stories about Cairo from my grandfather, who was born and raised in Jerusalem, Palestine. The son and grandson of an Ottoman *sarraf* (usually translated as banker or broker) and grandson of the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, my grandfather grew up moving with his male siblings and cousins around cities of the Arab world and Ottoman Empire for education and for commerce. They were educated in Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, and Istanbul. Cairo was not his home, but it was a place where he was at home.

This history shaped my approach to study of the region in ways I understood only much later. My grandfather brought his young family to New York from Palestine in 1930, after conflicts with the British government of Mandatory Palestine over his refusal to comply with orders from the Jewish Agency for Palestine to fire all the "Arabs" (as they are called in the documents) working under his supervision. As an engineer trained at the French University in Beirut, my grandfather had been hired by the Mandate government to supervise the construction of a road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. With threats and fines, the Mandate government and the Jewish Agency were pressuring him to hire European Jewish settlers in place of the Palestinian workers. Apparently technical matters about road construction, the labor force, and engineering became grounds for threats, angry memos, and litigation.

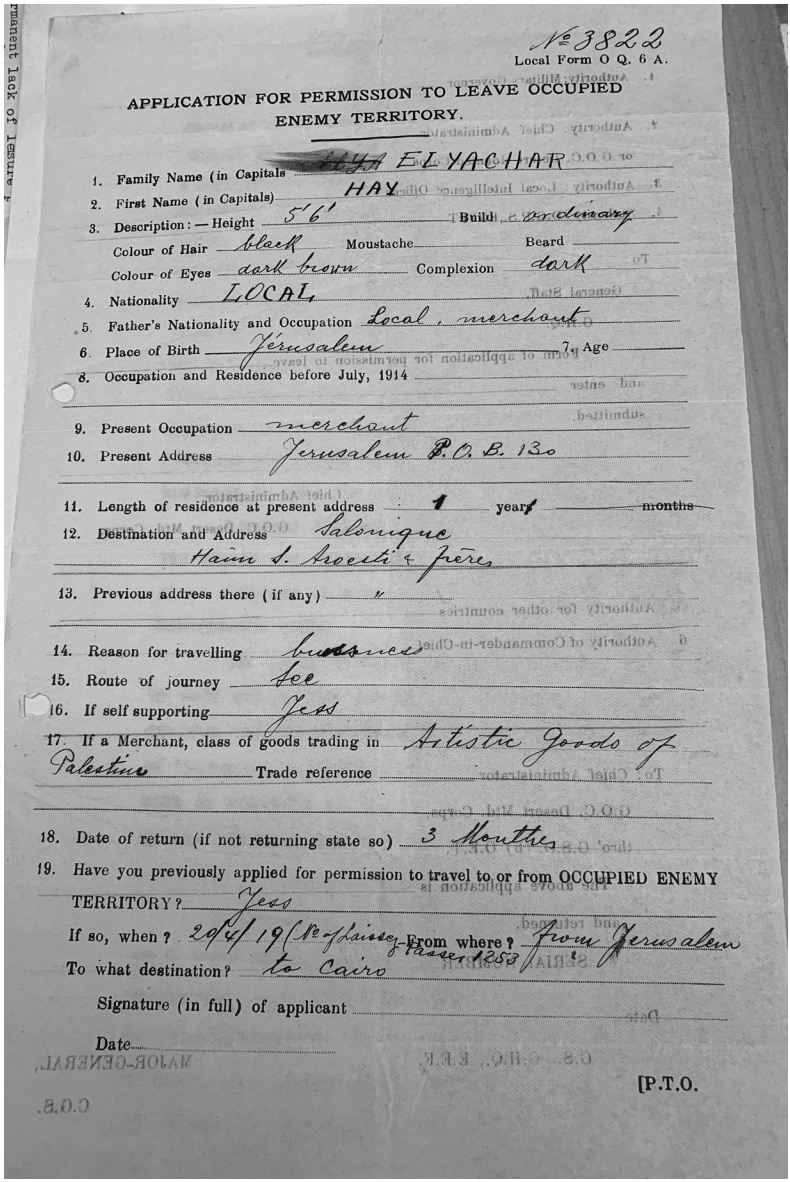
The road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem that my grandfather worked on just after World War I was just one of many infrastructure projects underway

in Palestine and the region at the time (Al-Saleh and Arefin 2020; Nucho 2018). Roads, railroads, and canals forged connections among different regions of the Ottoman Empire and, as such, were a key terrain of contestation that only intensified with the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. In fact, conflicts for control over roads, canals, and railroads across Palestine, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire were nothing new. Flows of commerce, people, moneys, commodities, and armies across the region had been a prime interest of governance in the Ottoman Empire. With the end of the Ottoman Empire and imposition of new kinds of imperial power, infrastructures of mobility and communicative infrastructures, as I call them in this book, were refigured as well. Control over channels through Egypt remained the object of imperial contestation and even wars, as in the 1956 Suez Crisis or "Tripartite Aggression" of Great Britain, France, and Israel against Egypt, when President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal.

I first encountered traces of these infrastructures of global mobility and sovereign affiliations in pieces of paper I found in a small, maroon leather suitcase in a corner of the dusty attic of my grandfather's home in New York after his death. I opened the lid of that suitcase and found papers my grandfather had clipped together and tied with string. Each piece of paper told a detail of his young life in Palestine: certificates of his training as apprentice to the Greek Orthodox architect Spyro Houris, notes from the Imperial Ottoman Bank, letters from brother to brother across oceans and time, and exit documents from Jerusalem under the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate, and the state of Israel.

My great-great grandfather's Ottoman exit document from Jerusalem is written in Ottoman Turkish calligraphy (figure I.1). It states his "place of birth" as "al-Quds al-Sherif," the Arabic name for Jerusalem, and his occupation as *sarraf*. My great-uncle's application for "Permission to leave Occupied Enemy Territory," issued by the British Occupied Enemy Territory Administration in Palestine after 1917, is typed in English (figure I.2). It has a new category, "nationality," which my great-uncle filled in as "local." By the time the government of British Mandatory Palestine was established in 1920, official exit documents were printed in English, Arabic, and Hebrew. They included that same query about "nationality," which my great-uncle again enters as "local." This category made sense to me only years later, after I learned about the institution of *local* as a category in British-occupied Egypt (Hanley 2017), which was contrasted to that of *beratlis*—those exempt from local law and taxation.

1.1 Ottoman exit document granting departure from Jerusalem in Islamic-calendar year 1323 (Gregorian calendar, 1905–6). Collection of the author.



№ 3822
Local Form O Q. 6 A.

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO LEAVE OCCUPIED ENEMY TERRITORY.

1. Family Name (in Capitals) ELYACHAR
2. First Name (in Capitals) HAY
3. Description: — Height 5'6" Build ordinary
Colour of Hair black Moustache Beard
Colour of Eyes dark brown Complexion dark
4. Nationality LOCAL
5. Father's Nationality and Occupation Local, merchant
6. Place of Birth Jérusalem 7. Age
8. Occupation and Residence before July, 1914
9. Present Occupation merchant
10. Present Address Jerusalem P.O.B. 130
11. Length of residence at present address 1 years months
12. Destination and Address Salonique
Haim S. Procati & frères
13. Previous address there (if any) "
14. Reason for travelling business
15. Route of journey Sea
16. If self supporting Yes
17. If a Merchant, class of goods trading in Artistic Goods of Palestine Trade reference
18. Date of return (if not returning state so) 3 Months
19. Have you previously applied for permission to travel to or from OCCUPIED ENEMY TERRITORY? Yes
If so, when? 20/4/19 (No. of Passport 1253) From where? From Jerusalem
To what destination? to Cairo
Signature (in full) of applicant
Date

[P.T.O.

I.2 Exit document, British Occupied Enemy Territory Administration in Palestine, 1919. Collection of the author.

Categories such as *local* or *beratli* were part of much broader systems of mobility, commerce, and finance that specialists discuss in terms of the "Ottoman capitulations." The capitulations were treaties organized along principles of extraterritoriality, in which one state (usually an imperial state) allowed another state to exercise jurisdiction over its own nationals within the first state's territory. Exterritoriality, in turn, was a logical extension of the personality of law, a principle usually associated with the Roman Empire, according to which a subject's attachment to the sovereign is embodied—that is, linked to the physical person, rather than to territory and borders—so that it moves through space with the extraterritorial subject, even, crucially, in the domains of another polity.[1] Such systems promoted the free flow of commerce across the domains of empire, wherein goods, money, and transactions carried out by these subjects were free from the constraints of local law as well.

The Ottoman capitulations were not restricted to the East. They were nothing exotic or oriental. On the contrary: the Ottoman capitulations were essential to the organization of global commerce for centuries. They brought extraterritoriality into the core of the international legal system of Westphalian territorial sovereign states (Özsu 2016a). And yet the capitulations, extraterritoriality, and personal law remain remarkably absent in Western social and political theory, as well as political economy and anthropology, up to the present day.

Over the centuries, relations between the Ottoman Empire and (what became) the capitalist West were mediated through these commercial and financial infrastructures and in private international law along the fluid and incorporative boundaries of empire (Burbank and Cooper 2011). Sojourners and travelers through Ottoman domains thus kept their sovereign affiliation with their place of birth. They moved through space along channels of extraterritorial belonging across domains of empire, rather than crossing with a passport the borders of nation-states in which the rule of law was (theoretically) homogeneously applied to all residents of the state. They might have carried with them an exit document of the kind carried by my great-great grandfather when he traveled out of Palestine.

Such exit documents marked the bearer's tie to his sovereign while traveling in distant lands. This attachment of people to their sovereign moved with them through space according to principles of personal law and was respected inside the domain of another sovereign. Subjects of an empire or state, meanwhile, might have multiple forms of sovereign affiliation. These principles were essential to global infrastructures of commerce and finance

that ran through the Ottoman Empire for centuries. I will unpack the implications of this global infrastructure of mobility and commerce for the making of what I call in this book the "semicivilized condition."

I came to think about the notion of the semicivilized through a set of problems that preoccupied me first as an ethnographer and student of both the history of thought and the former Ottoman Empire and then as a historical anthropologist of the region and ethnographer of Cairo from the vantage point of the former Ottoman Empire. I had questions: How did the vast literatures on colonialism and postcolonialism pertain to lands of the former Ottoman Empire, which was never (fully) colonized in a traditional sense? Why were the extraterritorial treaties in private international law—known in English as the capitulations, in Ottoman Turkish as *ahdname*, and in Arabic as *imtiyazat* (pledges, or privileges)—that provided essential infrastructure for global commerce through World War I so overlooked in political theory and political economy? Why were essential categories of social class in Egypt linked to that legal infrastructure absent in works of political economy and social science? Why were novels, films, and poetry so much better than the social sciences at capturing the essential dynamics of social change and political economy? And how could understanding such connections in relation to Egypt help us make sense of the world more broadly?

The concept of the semicivilized also gave me a vantage point from which to rethink a whole set of concepts in social sciences and critical theory such as sovereignty, territory, colonialism, and postcolonialism.[2] These foundational concepts had come to seem increasingly problematic in the years I worked on this book, as the twentieth-century global order they no longer adequately described came crashing down. Thinking from the standpoint of the semicivilized allowed me to better understand the ethnographic research I conducted in Cairo, Egypt, over many years and to consider how a set of problems long considered unique to the Middle East were in fact essential for understanding the world taking shape in the twenty-first century.

Literatures on colonialism, postcolonialism, and sovereignty did not do justice to this history or to the global scale, import, and effects of the institutions and infrastructures it generated. I turned to different kinds of literature to find analytic language that could help me make sense of what I saw. To make sense of that problem space, I began to use a concept cluster that cohered around the notion of the semicivilized. To clarify: by drawing on this language, I in no way mean to imply that Ottomans or Egyptians or Palestinians were somehow "semicivilized beings." That said,

it is my contention that it is a mistake to dismiss the semicivilized as an obscure and perhaps laughable contortion of civilizational discourse. After all, in the months when I finished this book, Israeli leaders were calling Palestinians "barbarians," a category linked to the semicivilized, to justify their dehumanization and attempted eradication through genocidal violence.

After decades of critique, the primitive/civilized divide remains a constitutive and unstable binary of twentieth-century Western thought. Inserting the semicivilized into that unstable binary can help destabilize the entire edifice of civilizational thinking. In any case, the so-called civilized world to which the semicivilized were so long denied entry is collapsing upon itself. Bringing this undercurrent of the barbarian and the semicivilized into sharper focus is an essential step of any project to imagine things differently in the bloody aftermath of civilizational thinking and colonizing orders.

Most of the ethnographic research for this book took place in Cairo. But to arrive at the core of those stories about Cairo over the many years I conducted research there, I travel in a circuitous path through this introduction to set the groundwork for the Cairo-based account that follows. Over the years, I have pursued parallel tracks of ethnographic and archival research in Cairo while continuing to read in Ottoman and Egyptian history, international law, the history of political thought, Middle Eastern studies, and coloniality studies. In what follows, I weave together these strands of inquiry to tell stories that emerged through both ethnography and the archives in which I was immersed.

Reintroducing in this way the concept of the semicivilized, which is absent in political economy, social theory, and studies of colonialism, shifts the meaning of conventionally used concepts and leads us to question the meaning they have in today's usage. It calls for the introduction of concepts such as personal law, dividual sovereignty, and extraterritoriality. These concepts help me make sense of my materials, such as my forebears' exit documents from Jerusalem with which I opened this book. That is not all. They mesh incredibly well with concepts I have previously developed to theorize my long-term ethnographic research in Cairo, such as embodied infrastructure, social infrastructures, and communicative channels (Elyachar 2010, 2011, 2012b). Through this cohesion, we can see that longer temporal dynamics and patterns are at play.

That said, this book is not about "the Ottoman exception." It is not a case study. It does more than increase awareness, I hope, of an important region neglected in many analytic frameworks. I do not want to add to the list of exceptions to "classic colonialism" or to grant the semicivilized its rightful

(if shameful) place in the middle of the primitive/civilized divide, thus inadvertently bolstering civilizational logics.[3] The point is not to develop a new subaltern category or "minoritizing view" (Sedgwick 2008, 1). It is to unsettle the entire organizing logic of how we think about colonialism, postcolonialism, and the primitive/civilized divide. I do so in this book by elucidating how dynamics of power, mobility, and sovereignty have often worked differently than dominant accounts of colonialism lead us to believe.

Arrangements of belonging, mobility, and transacting with others across space look quite different in empire-states around the world from China to the Ottoman Empire. Scholars have tried for decades to theorize these arrangements outside the constraints of area studies. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper (2011) built on many of those efforts in their masterful study called *Empires in World History*. But there is more to do. So much has been modeled on understanding the state, colonialism, and postcolonialism as territorial. In this book I present another model of how relations of subjects to states, bodies to rulers, residents to land, commoners to their cities, might be organized. The semicivilized is one element of this model, and the one I have chosen to signify its logics. The semicivilized is linked in my account to other important concepts that were set aside in the making of classical social theory, political economy, and theories of colonialism, such as the concept of extraterritoriality.

As a concept, extraterritoriality is tied to territoriality and to the system of territorial nation-states that shaped twentieth-century global order.[4] But there is nothing "extra" about extraterritoriality.[5] The term indexes this global regime of mobility that predates territoriality and never disappeared. The fact that extraterritoriality never went away highlights another reality: in modern territorial states, as in empires, sovereign power does not in fact map uniformly onto territory or citizenry. True enough, as a global infrastructure regulating the movement of people, finance, and commerce around inter-imperial worlds, extraterritoriality was largely dismantled in the early twentieth century with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. But extraterritoriality continued as a practice of international law: Legal extraterritoriality became known as "the assertion and exercise of jurisdictional powers beyond a specific territorial framework" (Margolies et al. 2019, 8).

Despite these continuities, extraterritoriality somehow sits ill at ease with contemporary notions of sovereignty and global order. Zones of exception for those who enjoy the benefits of extraterritoriality provoke outrage among locals in cases large and small, from crimes committed off base by

US military stationed abroad to cases of unpaid parking tickets accumulated by diplomats and their children in New York City. Sometimes people mix up extraterritoriality with the notion of cosmopolitanism. It is important to note that these two concepts operate on different levels. One is legal, jurisprudential; the other is an ideological construct, fashionable among the men of letters during the Enlightenment and then among early socialists in the nineteenth century. Cosmopolitanism often refers to the notion that we are citizens of the world rather than of a particular nation or state. Sometimes cosmopolitanism refers to the ability of some people to use multiple passports and to feel at home in different countries. Extraterritoriality is different. It refers to a global legal order.[6]

The new world order that took shape after World War I, formalized at the Paris Peace Conference and in the resulting Treaty of Versailles, abolished the Ottoman Empire and many provisions of the extraterritorial treaties, or capitulations. But despite declarations from the post-Versailles League of Nations about self-determination for all countries, only some would be allowed to enjoy rights of sovereignty and self-determination. Many countries had to wait until after World War II, or even later, to gain independence from colonial powers. Others enjoyed formal sovereignty but, in practice, held only partial power over their territory and inhabitants thanks to the continued salience of these extraterritorial treaties and the notion of the semicivilized to which they were linked.

The capitulations and the principles of extraterritoriality and personal law that they reflect and helped shape are not only absent in texts on political economy, social theory, and colonialism. They are more generally ignored in universalizing theories in the West, even though they are a global infrastructure of commerce and finance in Europe as well. There are exceptions; a few scholars have discussed capitulations as a kind of colonialism or imperialism, but they often get things wrong. In such formulations, the capitulations become but another example of imperialism or colonialism moving unidirectionally from the West onto an external East or Global South (Anghie 2012; Hindess 2005; Fidler 2000). Rosa Luxemburg wrote about Egyptian debt in *The Accumulation of Capital* ([1913] 1951), but in her analysis, Egyptian and Ottoman debt expressed a crisis of capital accumulation in Europe, exported to the East, rather than being part of an intertwined system of finance and banking.[7]

My grandfather's documents were part of this legacy. Those travel documents and papers, I would later realize, were ghostly traces of this global infrastructure of mobility based on principles of embodied sovereignty,

personal law, and extraterritorial belonging. As such, it became clear to me, the former Ottoman Empire—the region of the semicivilized—was a good place from which to rethink sovereignty, territory/ground, infrastructure, and embodiment more broadly. Thinking from here, different logics come into view. But as I will stress throughout this book, paying attention to these different logics is not about respecting cultural or regional difference. It is not a matter of the supposed exceptionalism of the Middle East or Arabs or Muslims or Orientals. Ottoman logics of sovereignty, territory, and international law, once again, are at least as universal and systemic as are cognate concepts in Western political theory.

Some matters at play are general to empires. Empires, to repeat, generally do not have fixed boundaries. They do not have territory; they have "domains." Power in empire can hop and skip along channels and across gaps of land and water. Such connecting channels across domains, lands, waters, and shores are a thread that moves through this book. I draw on these ideas to portray a world (and soon enough, a more general situation) that was labeled in Western international law and civilizational discourse as "the semicivilized."

Stories I will recount in this book are not exotic stories from the Middle East. They recount neglected infrastructures of the global order we live with today. Making my case entails a deep dive into history. Throughout this book, it is not the events of history I am after but rather "the processes that underlie and shape such events" (Wolf 1999, 8). Making sense of historical processes, in turn, demands engagement with concepts to help make sense of what is going on. But use of concepts "without attention to the theoretical assumptions and historical contexts that underlie them can lead us to adopt unanalyzed concepts and drag along their mystifying connotations into further work" (21). This is why I look to the semicivilized to unsettle established concepts in the social sciences and turn to other concepts to help me in that endeavor, such as dividual sovereignty, embodied infrastructures, global commerce, and communicative channels.

In thinking through this material, I also found it helpful to work with the concept of coloniality, which is delinked from the concept of territory that lurks behind the most common usages of *colonialism*.[8] Like the semicivilized of the former Ottoman Empire, many peoples have been unable to gain effective sovereignty over their land and resources or to escape the bonds of structural debt. Accounts of nonsovereign futures (Bonilla 2015), remaindered lives (Tadiar 2022), and "in between spaces that disturb the certainties of territory and mapping" (Thomas 2022, 250) felt strangely familiar

to me, as did Rocío Zambrana's (2021) work on coloniality and indebtedness without end. These kinds of conditions grouped together in the body of literature surrounding the concept of coloniality resonated with what I analyze in this book in terms of the semicivilized condition.

While semicivilized is a historical category, and one out of use today, the semicivilized remains with us as a condition of the present as well. This most obviously pertains to the Middle East, a region left to cope with violent legacies of extraterritoriality, the semicivilized, and the barbarian—even though these conditions are in no way unique to Egypt or the former Ottoman Empire. The war on terror launched after September 11, 2001, brought these concepts back to center stage. One hundred and more years after Versailles, the semicivilized, as a condition and a concept, continued to shape our world in ways that could no longer be overlooked, as twentieth-century institutions and certainties came unraveled in turn.

But that is not all. I will also shed light on practices that could be considered a kind of subaltern politics of the commons of the semicivilized. Such a politics includes, I suggest, potentiating forgotten pathways of moving, thinking, and acting in common on shaken grounds. I will explore the politics of movement and grounds by reading stories centered on Cairo. I will do so with the help of the concepts of personal law, embodied infrastructure, semiotic commons, and proprioception (the way we know where we are in space and how parts of our bodies relate to one another).

I wrote this book motivated by questions formed in the ethnographic present across my career, from my family archive in Palestine to thirty years of work in Cairo, and in my final year of work on this book, in the killing fields of Gaza. My experience living and working part time in former Yugoslavia (Slovenia and Croatia) since 2013, including living at a remove through the wars of succession and the genocide in Bosnia, also shaped my thinking about the semicivilized and the ways I learn from the semicivilized about pathways that move, however tenuously, toward different futures.

Inventing the Semicivilized

Ultimately, my grandfather decided to leave Palestine and emigrate to the United States. My grandfather's fight with the Chief Engineer of the British Mandate, refusing dictates to build infrastructure for a Jewish state with Jewish labor alone and to cede expert control to outsiders over details of how to build a road, pushed him to leave Palestine. But it was just a small moment in the hundred-year struggle for Palestine (Khalidi 2020), in the story

of the semicivilized as a category of international law, and in the designation of peoples of the region as uncivilized and undeserving of sovereignty.

The term *semicivilized* was also used in discussions of Japan, China, and the Philippines as well as the Mayan and Aztec Empires in the face of Spanish conquest (Brinton 1885; Hawkins 2020). These polities had recognizable sovereigns but were seen as fatally marked by extraterritoriality and uncivilized cultural practices. But the term *semicivilized* was coined by writers on international law who were attempting to make sense of the power of the Ottoman Empire and its extensive treaties with "Christian nations" of Western Europe. Many texts written in the nineteenth and early twentieth century took the Ottoman Empire as an exemplar of this "'semicivilized' status," which came to be "intimately associated with a host of perceived similarities between sovereign but politically and economically weak extra-European states" (Özsu 2016a, 124–25). The semicivilized were not deemed civilized enough to forgo extraterritoriality, which was "an exceptional mechanism best suited to circumstances in which existing laws were held inapplicable to western subjects" (125).

The term *semicivilized* is entangled in discourses about civilization that came into usage in the second half of the eighteenth century. *Civilization* was first used in France by Comte de Mirabeau (1756) and then across the Channel by Adam Ferguson in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767).[9] By then, historians and philosophers had developed the "stadial theory" of the progress of human societies, according to which human society progresses through a sequence of stages, from the "rude" to ever more complex, and finally to a "civilized" state. When *civilization* entered usage, it was slotted as the adjective "civilized" into the pinnacle of stadial theory. This pinnacle of civilizational status was also called "commercial society" or (in Ferguson's *Essay*) "civil society" (Pocock 2009, 2). Another part of this schema was the much older concept of "the barbarian" or "barbarism," usually slotted into the second of four stages of civilizational progress.

Barbarian was Greek in origin. With the Roman conquest of ancient Greece, the concept was incorporated into Roman law and transmitted through the Middle Ages to early modern and modern Europe (Pocock 2009). Originally, barbarians were those who did not speak Greek, but soon the term came to denote the differences between Greek and Persian ways of life, and thus the kind of "civilizational differences" that would later be invoked to mark the semicivilized as other.[10] Barbarians were first "spatialized" as part of an ontologically different world and later "temporalized" as belonging to the remote past, at the beginning of history, even though

they might live close by. In Reinhart Koselleck's view, the barbarian was an "asymmetric counterconcept" to the civilized world, essential to the very definition of the civilized as its negative and dehumanized counterpart (Koselleck [1975] 2004, 155–91, as cited in Vogt 2015, 126).[11]

Over time, the imaginary geography of barbarians shifted. For the Romans, barbarians were said to reside north of the Danube River. By the Crusades, barbarians were relocated to the south of the Danube (Pocock 2009, 2), to regions that, by the end of the Middle Ages, were known as the Balkans (Mastnak 2008). These lands would be incorporated into the Ottoman Empire over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In this geographic imaginary, barbarism was further associated with shepherds, who sometimes stood in for the second "barbarian" stage of stadial theory (as in Adam Smith's four stages theory; see Smith [1796] 1982). Barbarian shepherds were "nomadic." They moved around, resisting the civilizing virtues of commerce and settled cultivation. They were not productive, countable, and taxable, a dilemma faced as well by the Ottomans (N. E. Barakat 2023).

This was not all. Backward societies could, according to stadial theory, progress to higher stages of civilization. After 1492, those dubbed "primitive" in the Americas and Africa were usually seen by Westerners as being "stuck" on the civilizational ladder. Those dubbed "barbarian," in contrast, were often seen as capable of "receiving" civilization, of becoming civilized. Barbarism was a condition from which some people could advance. Those in the higher stages of development could—and must—take on the mission of transmitting civilization to those in the lower stages. This was the theory behind the post–World War I system of Mandates for regions of the former Ottoman Empire; it was the logic that underlies what would become "development" in the twentieth century as well as the wars on the region in the early twenty-first century. This is a logic I will take up further in chapter 2.

Semicivilized never entered anthropological discourse. Instead, it is associated with international law. But the concept carries the stain of the concept of the barbarian and thus lies at the heart of the notion of Western civilization. The concept of the barbarian played an important place in the field of "comparative ethnology" that was influential at the University of Chicago, in particular (Camic 2020; Stocking 1987), and in the writings of many ethnologists, anthropologists, and economist/sociologists at the turn of the twentieth century, including those of Thorstein Veblen, who regularly drew on the concept of the barbarian to analyze what was wrong with the parasitic and nonproductive "leisure class" of the United States (Camic 2020; Veblen 1899). Soon enough, the paired concepts of the "primitive" and

the "civilized" became central to anthropology instead. Anthropology put aside the category of barbarian in favor of the primitive.

In comparison with the wholesale critique of colonialism and the notion of the primitive in anthropology and postcolonial studies, the barbarian has been relatively ignored. That is, until it erupted in the first half of the twenty-first century. The discourse of the war on terror declared by US president George Bush in 2003, and most recently seen with the war on Gaza and the Palestinians in 2023, overtly used the language of the barbarian to justify carpet bombing, genocidal violence, urbicide, and ethnic cleansing in former Ottoman regions of the semicivilized such as Iraq, Bosnia, Syria, and Palestine. This book provides conceptual language to understand why this dehumanizing language of the barbarian has such continued power and how it relates to the semicivilized in Egypt and places much farther afield.[12]

But this dehumanizing language is not totalizing. Associating the semicivilized with the barbarian and the nomad points to submerged potentialities and pathways of mobility that escape territorialization and totalizing control. Nomadic pathways of mobility exceed frameworks of territory and territorial coloniality. In the second half of this book, I move from the hinterlands of the so-called shepherds and barbarians of stadial theory to focus on the embodied infrastructures and communicative channels forged by and tended to by commoners of the semicivilized. I call these the "commons of the semicivilized," which I analyze in conversation with the work of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) on the undercommons, AbdouMaliq Simone's (2022) concept of the surrounds, and Neferti Tadiar's (2022) analysis of remaindered life. Such embodied infrastructures exceed the fictions of homogeneous territory at the core of classic concepts of sovereignty in Western political thought. The commons of the semicivilized, I argue, give other grounds for the constitution of collective life on shaken grounds than those that were lionized in the 2010s by Western political theorists of the commons, and which rest on problematic entanglements of the concept of the commons with Christian moral philosophy and British colonial practice.

Archives from the Dust

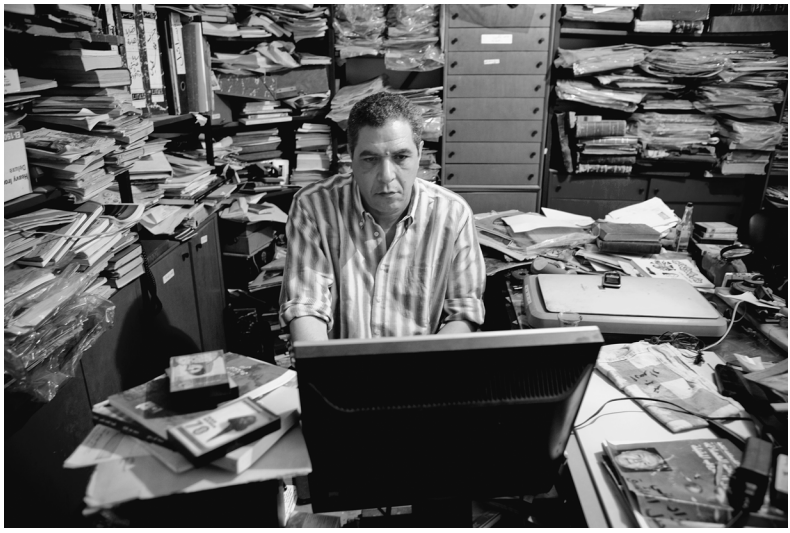
As an anthropologist, I find my questions in ethnography and in the archives, which I read together with the silences and aporia of theory. Ethnography is an unparalleled approach to revealing emergent phenomena taking shape in times of vast social and political transformation. This kind of approach was described by Eric Wolf (1999) in his posthumous collection, *Envisioning*

Power. Beginning with problems emerging in the ethnographic present, he says, ethnographers also "locate the object of our study in time" (8). This gives us the capacity to identify the conjuncture of forces acting on a particular field in overlapping circles or frames. Throughout these chapters, I tell stories of people making their way through moments of conjuncture and flux at national and global levels. This helps us see, in Cairo and elsewhere, how dismantled institutions and political arrangements of the semicivilized, personal law, and extraterritoriality wield their influence in the present and, in turn, how we can more consciously respond to their influence. Those stories sometimes appear in archives from the street, or of the kind collected by my friend and colleague Essam Fawzi over the years.

I met Essam after the first year of my dissertation fieldwork in Cairo in 1994. My research was still focused on the circular migration of Egyptian men to the Gulf States and the impacts of that migration on the remaking of identity and urban space in Cairo. We began to have regular conversations, went on to work together in key parts of my dissertation fieldwork that shifted over the year to come, and have remained friends ever since. Over the course of two years in the mid-1990s, and then whenever possible in the years that followed, we talked and walked down streets, jumped on buses, walked into cafés, visited friends, debated theory among ourselves in Arabic and in conversations with friends—sometimes in three languages, English, Arabic, and Russian.

In those early years, we worked and thought on the move. We might jump in an instant down from a microbus and up onto a public-sector bus, only to step down again and glide into the rhythm and pace of the neighborhood in which we landed. In the immediate aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, and then with the momentous changes and our own aging that followed, our movement around Cairo became more constrained. Our pathways moved through only specific neighborhoods and streets. We began to spend more time with Essam's interlocutors in the archives piled up around him in endless files and papers and posters along the walls.

One mild day in February 2019, I stepped out of a taxi on Qasr el-Aini Street in Cairo. I was spending time in Cairo, visiting friends and talking together over various projects of which we had dreamed and still dreamed, even as the years possible for their achievement and the scope of possibilities for life itself had constricted so drastically over time. I stepped into the dark, shadowed lobby of a once glorious building. The *bawab*, or doorman, waved me on toward the hand-worked iron open elevator that had served the building for over fifty years. Upstairs, Essam opened the door with a



I.3 Essam Fawzi at work with his collection, "archives from the dust," Cairo, 2009. Photograph by Hossam el-Hamalawy.

smile and welcomed me in. Two years ago, this apartment had been little more than a warehouse of paper overflowing from boxes, files, and shelves. The apartment was a collection of paper, posters, records, and files that we had come to call "archives from the dust" (figure I.3). That was the name we had given to the project in our grant applications seeking funds to digitize Essam's collection. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted that project just a year later.

Essam has supplied help to generations of researchers in Cairo, both Egyptian and foreign. We were meeting with our friends Laila, who had become an archivist in the intervening years, and Muna, who was also working on the archive. In calling it "archives from the dust," we were not thinking then of historian Carolyn Steedman's (2002) book *Dust*, in which archival work emerges as a kind of embodied practice, and we did not know of the emergent work of anthropologist Aya Nassar (2017) on dust and archival method in Cairo. It was simply the embodied experience over two decades of pulling paper out of the dust of basements and boxes and garbage and of working with the dusty piles of paper in Cairo apartments that gave us the idea for the name in our early applications and writings.

This time, however, things looked neater and more organized than they had been a few years ago, when the paper and dust had really been out of

control. I remembered one visit when the stacks of boxes of paper were piled up on the apartment's small balcony and there was barely any room to walk. Now, some folders were even labeled. That said, paper was still climbing up the walls. Files and papers and photos peeked out from shelves lining the hallway, amid dusty images of an Egypt supposedly gone. Framed movie posters from the 1960s, an old gramophone, and photographs of 'Umm Kulthum and President Nasser marked the walls. Essam's archives from the dust were living archives, in endless bits of knowledge shared for free, sometimes for a living wage, and sometimes in precious interviews that can be found on YouTube. Our shared archives were kinetic and formative for my work on gesture, embodied commons, and social infrastructure at the core of this book.

Essam's living archives were also material culture: turn on an old gramophone from Cairo and play some of the old 33s with the music of 'Umm Kulthum and Abdel Wahab, and a different Cairo comes alive, channeling its power into the present. For a time, in the years after the January 25 Revolution of 2011, Essam had shared his living archive of Cairo in a short-lived television show called *al-Arshevgi*, or *The Archivist*.

Archives are never neutral; violence is often intertwined with the making, destruction, abandonment, and theft of archives. In her book *Archive Wars*, Rosie Bsheer (2020) shows the centrality of archives to the ideological work of politics and state-making anywhere. What is gathered, what is forgotten, and what is destroyed? These foundational questions of the archives pertain to my movement through archives in this book as well. In Egypt and around the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, books and files from the Arab and Islamic worlds were gathered up and appropriated for petty cash by greedy collectors who turned local knowledge into raw materials and archives of the "civilized West."

Most of the documents in Essam's collection were literally reclaimed from the trash. During a 1990s real estate boom in Cairo, investors bought up villas in upper class sections of Cairo and destroyed them in order to redevelop the land for more lucrative purposes. Before tearing down the buildings, they had emptied out storehouses of papers and boxes from the basements. All of it had been thrown out. From the basements of a villa here and a villa there, built by and lived in by the cultural and political elite of Cairo from the 1880s through the 1980s, a treasure trove of materials was discarded.

But nothing ended there: disentangled from the people and lives that gave meaning and value to those archives from different moments of Egypt's

dramatic history, moments of conjuncture, and times of flux, the paper entered a vast Cairene recycling system. The paper moved through layers of garbage sorters and traders and merchants who were experts in sorting out its value. These *zabaleen* are experts in revaluation: they turn back into value any trash with a potential market. They were central to the making of this archive from the dust.

Each piece of paper recounts a moment of life amid revolutions, coups, invasions, commerce, opera, and war sweeping through the region and this city cursed and blessed with being 'Umm el-Dunya, center of the world. There were personal letters, official transcripts, scripts, musical scores, letters of passion and distress, faded pages of Coca-Cola ads, movie posters from the 1910s to the 1940s, transcripts of meetings made historic only over time. Stacks of paper, the records of lifetimes lived in quite different historic conjunctures—documents from the British Occupation after the 'Urabi Revolt of 1882, the Khedivate, from 1853 to the beginning of World War I, and the British protectorate from 1914 to 1922; political parties' pamphlets and magazines of popular culture; letters of love and the scripts of plays; accounts of commerce and the founding of companies—multiple worlds and lifetimes went into the trash as speculative real estate took off in the 1980s and 1990s. But that was not the end of the story.

We followed the trails of some of these stories and pieces of paper in Essam's archive to see how traces of these pasts were manifest in the distributed collective practices of the common people of Cairo. The many archives of Cairo cohere as a kaleidoscope, bringing together accounts from different institutional actors that administered, governed, and exercised (degrees of) sovereignty over Cairo and Egypt. In this way, extant imperial and inter-imperial formations leave ethnographically tractable traces in archives of urban space.

Everywhere were the embodied archives of Cairo, or the history we carry on our backs, as the great Egyptian sociologist Sayyid 'Uways put it in the 1970s, in collectives practices, patterns of movement on the street, and the embodied infrastructures that supported (for a time) the political economy of survival in Cairo and which attracted the attention of investors, bankers, development officials, and revolutionaries across Cairo's many circles. This "embodied archive," "carried on our back[s],"[13] will be an important focus of this book, where I weave together accounts of personal law in which travelers and sojourners (Benton 2002) carry with them their sovereign affiliations as they move through space, infrastructures of extraterritoriality that promoted flows of commerce through inter-imperial worlds,

and embodied infrastructures as a collective resource, or commons, of the "locals," or commoners, of Cairo. This embodied archive helps bring to light many other collective resources of the common people of Cairo.

The notion of carrying history in movement down the street is part of what I call "embodied infrastructure" (despite the problems with the concept embodiment).[14] We will see this through analyses of gestural commons, social infrastructures of communicative channels, and proprioception. The history of the urban commons is an archive—an embodied archive—of Cairo, a great city founded in and continuously inhabited since 646 CE. History is nothing abstract, 'Uways made clear. Those blessed and cursed to be born, live, and die in a "living encyclopedia" like Cairo carry that history with them. This is another legacy of the semicivilized.

Some neighborhoods and people of Cairo are (or perhaps were) called *sha'bi*. The word is usually translated to English as "popular," or part of the urban masses. In recent years the word *sha'bi* has become known globally through associations with the *mahraganat* or *sha'bi* music used by Egyptian director Mohamed Diab in the blockbuster Marvel Studies/Disney film *Moon Nights*. The term *sha'bi* is central to Cairene culture and life and yet is generally missing from social science analytics. The word is used descriptively in wonderful ethnographic work on Cairo (e.g., El-Messiri 1978). But it is possible and in fact urgent to approach *sha'bi* as a concept and to locate its meaning in a broader discursive and political field that may no longer have legal efficacy but that leaves ineffable traces, nonetheless.

Lives of the popular urban masses of Cairo, according to 'Uways, are deeply rooted in the built space of their neighborhoods, or *hara*. The past is present here in the most visceral of fashion.[15] It lives on through communicative channels built into the historic structures of Cairo, such as the messages 'Uways studied, which were written on paper and stuffed into the porous walls of the Mausoleum of Imam Shafi'i, which dates back to 1176 and is located in the City of the Dead. This is an inhabited district of Cairo and also a UNESCO World Heritage Site with historic mausoleums in a cemetery that has been in use since the Arab conquest of Cairo in 646. Key parts of this neighborhood were bulldozed in the early 2020s to make room for superhighways connecting Cairo to the New Administrative Capital, located twenty-six kilometers to the east of Cairo, which we will discuss further across this book. Those messages stuffed into the walls of a shrine are also calls for intervention in the most difficult and sensitive aspects of life.

All this could be quite vivid for someone born, like many of my interlocutors in the 1990s, right after the Free Officers Movement of 1952 that overturned

the lingering monarchy carved out of the Ottoman order by Mehmet Ali and his heirs. They lived through the rise of Nasser, the one president of Egypt with the power and legitimacy to make movement on streets and in marketplaces around the Arab world come to a complete standstill through the mere sound of his voice over the radio (Salem 2020). They lived through the assassination of Nasser, the rise of President Anwar Sadat and the *infitah*, or the economic "opening" of the national economy, during a period of politics and time with many of a generation in jail. The assassination, in turn, of Sadat in 1981 and the rise of President Hosni Mubarak, who was forced to resign by the January 25 Revolution, centered around Cairo's Tahrir Square, was part of their lived experience, as was the making and deconstruction of Egypt's "socialist" face and the country's move away from the its location at the center of the "three circles of Egypt," in the Middle East, Asia Minor (Turkey), and Africa, toward the West, with the financing and military aid of the United States, since the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1976.

The archives of Egypt were long read as unfolding toward a territorial nation-state sovereignty—a perspective on Egypt's history that took precedence after the 1952 coup that brought Nasser and the other "Free Officers" into power. Nationalist historiography of Egypt marginalized its Ottoman past, most famously through the rewriting of the name of the governor and then founder of a ruling dynasty, Mehmet Ali, as Mohammed Ali (Fahmy 2009, 2010). The historiography of Egypt, focused on the territory of Egypt within its national borders, hides its complex entanglements with the Sudan, Syria, Hijaz, and the eastern Mediterranean, or Levant. All this gives too unitary a picture of the archive and of power and sovereignty. When we expand our vision of the archive, the grip of territorialism on our imagination can loosen.

Semicivilized Infrastructures

The Middle East was global in orientation long before globalization; circuits of mobility for pilgrimage, commerce, and labor inscribed the region even before the rise of Islam; and markets have been highly monetized for millennia. The region not only had some of the oldest and most sophisticated market, political, and military systems in the world. It also had written language, states, and religions that were recognizable to both Crusaders and colonizers. Global flows of people, goods, and moneys moved across transimperial spaces and global cities in different kinds of arrangements without nation-states, fixed borders, passports, or territorial colonialism.

From this perspective we can ask: How are global flows of mobility of people, goods, and moneys regulated without the assumed role of territory, borders, and passports? What happens when we drop the assumptions of territory and territoriality that form a shared discursive space in debates about colonialism and postcolonialism?

Territoriality indeed tends to be taken for granted in many discussions of sovereignty in the social sciences (Elden 2013; Philpott 2020). In such discussions, the relation of citizen/subject to the sovereign is set by a person's location inside a fixed geographic location (Philpott 2020). This approach to sovereignty emphasizes the unitary relation of citizen to sovereign in a bounded area of land. Land and individual are related here in a way that echoes definitions of unitary ownership of private property in land (Bhandar 2018; Philpott 2020).

A common definition of *sovereignty* is supreme authority within a territory (Philpott 2020). Sovereignty is unitary in classic approaches to the topic and in the constitution of the European political system of states (Philpott 2020), which evolved in the process of reworking relations among rulers rather than relations between rulers and the ruled (Hinsley 1966).[16] Despite an endless series of exceptions to unitary sovereignty cited in the literature—including arrangements made in all sorts of colonial ventures—unitary sovereignty remains the default case. And yet, there is another tradition of thinking about sovereignty from within the Western tradition, referred to as "dividual sovereignty."[17] Neither exceptional nor a marker of failed sovereign projects within these threads of Western political thought, dividual sovereignty is a key part of the semicivilized condition.

Dividual sovereignty can be found in writings of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), such as his classic analysis of public authority, *De jure belli ac pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*, [1625] 1925). In this book, Grotius explicitly endorsed the theory of unitary sovereignty that had recently been advanced by Jean Bodin (1530–96), agreeing that "sovereignty (*summum imperium*) is a unity, in itself indivisible" (Keene 2004, 44, citing Grotius [1625] 1925, 123). But even while endorsing Bodin's conception of sovereignty as indivisible, Grotius "proceeded to offer a series of exceptions to the general definition that, to all intents and purposes, nullified it." In both theory and practice, according to Grotius, sovereignty was often divided. This was neither exceptional nor problematic (Keene 2004, 44).

Arrangements of dividual sovereignty are at least as common as unitary sovereignty and formed the empirical material for classic political and social theory from Grotius to Henry Sumner Maine (1822–1888). British rule in

India and in North America was pragmatic and situational (Keene 2004, 93). Imperial rulers had no interest in the arrangements of settler colonialism or in controlling a territory when they could reach their aims by incorporating local systems of rule or through legal commercial arrangements. Even the commons were an essential part of these modes of colonial rule, as Maine made clear in his work theorizing British practices of dividual sovereignty in India, where the British state inserted itself into polities of the Mughal Empire, first via the "company state" of the East India Company. Maine put things very simply: "Sovereignty has always been regarded as divisible" (Keene 2004, 78).[18] Maine wrote of sovereignty as a "bundle of powers" that could be divvied up and separated from one another (Maine 1915; Keene 2004, 108).[19]

Given the many problems with unitary sovereignty in both theory and practice, many anthropologists and critical theorists have challenged the relevance of sovereignty and statehood altogether. But when thinking from the semicivilized in the Middle East, things look different. So many lives have been lost in the endlessly denied struggle for sovereignty and viable collective futures that it becomes harder simply to dismiss the question of sovereignty as a false dream. What pathways of thought and politics emerge when we linger more with concepts of dividual sovereignty and the semicivilized?[20]

Rather than promoting or dismissing sovereignty, I draw on concepts that cohere around the semicivilized. Here I refer, first, to the concept I mentioned earlier, personal law—the notion that law is linked not to territory but to individuals in their place of birth and, crucially, moves with the body through channels of imperial space. Linked to this notion of bodies moving through channels is, of course, the concept of extraterritoriality, which puts into a spatial framework the implications of personal law and highlights the stark reality that in modern territorial states, as in empires, sovereign power does not map uniformly onto territory. From this framework, I turn in the second half of the book to what I call "embodied infrastructures," which coexist with more traditionally conceived kinds of physical infrastructure such as roads, railroads, or telephone lines, and which anthropologists, among others, have extensively studied.[21]

This starting point allows me to focus on channels rather than on unitary infrastructures within a territory and to shift away from assumptions of territory and stable ground that underlie concepts of sovereignty, political economy, and economic growth. Thinking from the semicivilized, I focus on contests for dominance over the channels through which commerce,

military, and value flow. Both territory and solid ground are, in fact, unsettled as assumptions in the background of social theory and political economy. Cultivating capacities for awareness of collectivity on shaken grounds becomes a starting point for theory and politics alike (Elyachar 2022; Morimoto 2012).[22]

To consider other possibilities for collectivity on shaken grounds, it is important to note arrangements linking body, ground, and sovereignty in the Ottoman and other empires. We know by now that empires such as the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal had no passports or fixed borders.[23] Instead, such empires had a different logic, a "spotty" (Burbank and Cooper 2011) relation to their "domains." They had no "territory" and were not "territorial states." Being part of an empire was regulated in large part through relations of tax and tribute. Political belonging was thus linked to finance, which was a mode of rule, a language of political power, and a channel of ongoing interaction and mobility with Western Christian nations (Derri 2021b). This is a very different ecosystem of finance and politics than what is often taken for granted in discussions about colonialism or postcolonialism and will thus also be at the heart of this book. Such an ecosystem brings together questions of finance and mobility that are unfamiliar in most approaches to political economy or colonial studies.

This global infrastructure of commerce was enshrined in international law. Negotiating an end to the capitulations was the "greatest challenge facing US negotiators at Versailles," in the words of one participant in the negotiations ending World War I.[24] The United States was the last "Christian power" of the West to gain an extraterritorial treaty with the Ottoman Empire. The United States fought hard to retain its privileges even as the Ottoman Empire was being dissolved. It retained for itself the right to intervene in the region to this day. US Syria expert Dana Stroul (2019), for example, overtly used this language of the US "owning" parts of (resource-rich) Syria and casually referred to the "right" of the United States to determine the course of events in a state it formally recognizes as sovereign.

Successor states to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also defeated in World War I, were quickly recognized in international law to block the spread of communism. Regions of the Ottoman Empire had no such luck. The semicivilized states were deemed unworthy of the "gift of sovereignty" (Grant 2009). The very existence of extraterritorial treaties that the United States and other Western powers had refused to renounce was also invoked as a logic for refusing sovereignty. The semicivilized retained the stain of the barbarian, outside the sphere of civilization, in a less-than-human status.

The attribution of semicivilized status would have devastating impact in the century to come, in a fashion that only intensified as I completed this book at the beginning of 2024.

The Three Circles of Egypt (and the Levant)

Archives from the dust, and the long history of archives and archiving in Cairo, reveal other forms of extractive violence. Knowledge contained in Cairo's Arabic books and manuscripts was transformed in the nineteenth century into the raw archival materials of the West and, in the process, revalued and financialized property was transformed into waqf—a form of pious property or trust.[25] Egypt, like the Ottoman Empire as a whole, was put into the box of the semicivilized from which archives could be extracted, debts without end accumulated, and channels through its terrain fought over by multiple players.

This process is not unlike more recent methods of turning national wealth into financialized debt. In the early twenty-first century, the wealth of the Egyptian nation, held as public goods by the state, was securitized by a stroke of an administrative pen and turned into public-private partnerships. Moving land and buildings as "real estate" into Sovereign Wealth Funds generated immense profits for foreign investors and military-owned companies alike. Resources and channels for which so many lives were given in past centuries were handed over for a pittance to new overseers of the semicivilized—sovereign wealth funds of the Arab Gulf States together with Western corporations and the Egyptian military. This is one of the stories we will chart across this book. Citizens of Egypt still have little recourse to determine the fate of their resources and how they are deployed. They remain in the waiting house of history (Chakrabarty 2000; Seikaly 2019).

Cairo has long been experienced as a place of multiple sovereignties and generative identities. It has been a node on circuits of movement across empires, on trade routes across sub-Saharan and North Africa, and around the regions of the Arab world for centuries and even millennia. As such, Cairo has long been integrated into multiple and overlapping circles of belonging. One of those circles is a circle of empire—the Ottoman Empire. Egypt was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 to 1914, with various degrees of integration. The Ottoman Empire was dissolved at the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. And yet, some aspects of this Ottoman order—such as regimes of extraterritoriality and personal law instituted to promote flows of commerce across Ottoman domains—lasted much longer, including in Egypt.

In this book, I write of Cairo from the standpoint of a post-Ottoman, postimperial ethnography with multiple circles of sovereign belonging. This approach grew out of my frustration with concepts that did not help me theorize the worlds in which I was immersed. I had no conceptual language with which to analyze crucial aspects of daily life that attracted my analytic eye—ways of moving, talking, chatting, hanging out, and making markets that I subsequently analyzed in terms of phatic labor (Elyachar 2010) and social infrastructures of communicative channels (Elyachar 2010, 2011, 2012b). Another concept I found helpful was Gamal Abdel Nasser's "three circles of Egypt"—Arab, Islamic, and African—in his *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*, which was published in 1955, one year after consolidating power in Egypt following the Free Officers Movement.

This concept is related to political movements of pan-Arabism at the time and to long-standing efforts of Egypt, since Mehmet Ali, to conquer and, under Nasser, to form a union with Syria. The phrase "three circles of Egypt" also had resonance in the global nonaligned movement and in Black internationalist movements of the 1960s. Malcolm X invoked Nasser's concept to theorize "U.S. domestic coloniality in terms of overlapping diasporas" (Alhassen 2015, 1).[26] Cairo became a "Black Atlantic Metropole" in the 1960s that offered a "welcoming stance as a home for African peoples" (3). As adopted by Malcolm X, Nasser's vision of the "three circles of Egypt" gave grounds for an internationalist "geo-racio-religious imaginary" that reconfigured common understandings of "home" delinked from the necessary referent of "a land" (14) or the unified territory of a nation-state.

Nasser's three circles made no mention of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman pasts were boxed off in nationalist accounts of Egypt's history. And yet, this imperial circle of Egypt's past did not simply disappear with the Ottoman Empire or with Egypt's relative independence achieved by Mehmet Ali from the Ottoman Empire.[27] For example, the "Egyptian Mixed Courts" that grew out of the Ottoman system of extraterritoriality were part of the Egyptian legal system until 1947. Key categories of this order—such as the "local" who is subject to local rule of law, versus the "extraterritorial" who is not subject to local law—leave traces in the present and lie at the heart of this book.

The last circle of Egypt, or of Cairo more specifically, that I draw on in this book is the Levant. The term *Levant* usually pertains to the Ottoman shorelines of the Mediterranean, or the former Ottoman Province of Syria, today's Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. That would seem to have nothing to do with Cairo, which is not even on the Mediterranean, unlike the Egyptian city of Alexandria. Nor does the Levant as I use it in this book overlap with

the geographic concept of the Eastern Mediterranean that is commonly used by historians of the region. And yet, Cairo is regularly mentioned as part of "the Levant" in archival documents about commerce and its flows through the Ottoman Empire. And Cairo is a key location of the world's first lingua franca of commerce in the Levant.

Before *lingua franca* denoted any composite language of trade, it was a specific commercial dialect of the Levant, spoken among all those engaged in commerce around the Mediterranean and the Levant. The Levant and its lingua franca make explicit two archaic meanings of commerce crucial to this book: communication and the exchange of goods with others in different locations. *Franca* or *Frank* eventually became the signifier of all Western non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. The lingua franca of the Levant was a communicative channel for all who engaged in commerce.

This lingua franca referred to both a language and an identity. The Levantini, as they were called in Venice, were responsible for moving key commodities of urban life around the region. They differed from locals, or commoners, who stayed in one place and were linked only to one sovereign ruler. Sometimes *Levantini* had the dual meaning of being "shifty, even sketchy men" from the region who could easily shift from one language and location to another (Rothman 2012, 2013). By the early eighteenth century, *Levantine* had become a headword in an Italian-English dictionary, meaning "Natives or Inhabitants of the Levant, the Eastern People" (Rothman 2012, 213). It had its own natives. It became meaningful to speak of "Natives of the Levant."

By the nineteenth century, *Levantine* had come to mean "non-Muslim Ottoman subjects, marked by vaguely 'European' habits and sometimes ancestry but corrupted by their surrounding environment into a lifestyle that was not quite European" (Rothman 2012, 214). The Levantine had become something recognizable as a "nation," or "ethnic group." Or else it could mean an "Easterner" from the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Eventually, the notion of Levantine as nation became attached to geography—the eastern shores of the Mediterranean in particular. However, Levantine remained an inter-imperial relational concept as well.

Levantine is not an identity used by anyone in this book. Egypt was, and is, enmeshed in much broader geographies of political economy and attempts at imperial state formation from the Sudan to Syria. But the concept of the Levant appears repeatedly in the archives I draw on. The Levant is a space where infrastructures of commerce crisscrossed the Mediterranean from today's Italy to the eastern Ottoman Empire.[28] It matters further as a

space where categories of embodied sovereignty, extraterritorial belonging, and channels of commerce/communication were worked out. Those categories appear over and over in the living archives of so-called popular culture in Cairo. These categories form an extant world of the semicivilized and shape the embodied infrastructures and commons of urban life I am concerned with in this book.

Debts of Improvement

The semicivilized were only exceptionally and temporarily subjected to full territorial colonialism. That said, their fate is deeply marked by the theory that "civilized" peoples with supposedly more "advanced sciences and arts" have a right to settlement in the name of "improvement." This is most clearly visible in the case of Palestine.[29] But everywhere, rendering the lands of the semicivilized "improved" entailed multiple investments and forms of violence (Li 2014). Theories of improvement were also important to the Ottomans, who by the nineteenth century deployed theories of improvement to deem the land of Bedouin communities in Ottoman Syria "empty" and to promote the settlement of groups they considered potentially more productive (N. E. Barakat 2023).

Improvement also entailed the mobilization of huge amounts of credit and debt for the laying of new infrastructural channels by which to move goods to market, to convert fruit into commodities, or to transform the Isthmus of Suez into a primary channel of commerce up to our own times. Responsibility for the credits and debts of building infrastructure fell on the Ottoman Empire and its constituent (and semi-independent) parts. Finance was inseparable from regimes of mobility throughout the domains of empire. Finance did not cause the problems of the semicivilized. But it was a channel through which those problems took shape. One such moment was with consolidation of the theory of "improvement" as a legal basis for settlement. Alberico Gentili (1552–1608), known as a "father of international law," along with Hugo Grotius and Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546), provides important material to see how this is so.[30] I take a moment to delve into this issue because of how productively it complicates common binaries of colonized/decolonized and provides pathways for rethinking both settler colonialism and a notion of the semicivilized.

Gentili theorized the right of technically advanced, civilized Western Europeans to settle in the Ottoman Empire even though, he emphasized, the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan was fully legitimate. Gentili was a

Levantine of sorts. He was from the Marches region of central Italy, on the Adriatic. He grew up in a world of commerce flowing across the Adriatic and Mediterranean and regulated by the Venetian and Ottoman Empires. He lived through the move of the English into the Levant trade, initiated by Queen Elizabeth I, and England's establishment of the Levant Company through the merger of the Turkey Company and the Venice Company. He was a refugee from the Inquisition in today's Ljubljana, before he and his father went on to England and he was appointed Regius Professor of Law at Oxford in 1587.[31] Particularly helpful is his focus on the urban as the key site for distinctions between residents categorized as commoners versus extraterritorials.

Gentili wrote at a time of growing maritime struggle for control over global commerce, including Spanish and Ottoman aspirations for "universal monarchy" (Kingsbury 1998, 719). He countered those aspirations in part by drawing on Roman law and the Roman notion of jus gentium (or law of nations) "as a kind of transnational law, applied by custom and on the basis of reason in many different political and legal orders" (Kingsbury 1998, 715). Gentili's legal thinking pertained to the geographic scope of the Roman Empire in a very urban picture of geography, international law, treaties and extraterritoriality (720–21).

In Gentili's view, commerce was part of natural law. Any attempt to ban this new global expansion of commerce led by England and its corporate sovereign entities like the Levant Company and the Royal African Company, he thought, would be contrary to natural law and, as such, not only futile but also an invitation to war (Kingsbury 1998, 714). Gentili was fully aware of the power of the Ottoman sultan and granted, without reservation, the legitimacy of his sovereignty. He included the Ottoman Empire and the exterritorial treaties of the Ottoman capitulations (those extraterritorial treaties established by the Ottomans to promote and regulate commerce in Ottoman domains that I discussed above) in his loose framework of the international law of nations.

Gentili's use of the concepts of "nations" and "law of nations" took the Ottomans and their extraterritorial legal infrastructure fully into account.[32] Each nation had its own culture and legal system that was accorded respect and legitimacy in treaties and agreements with other sovereigns. In this legal ecosystem, the customs and traditions of each nation (before the era of the territorial nation-state) were recognized as valid.[33] At the same time, Gentili conceded "extensive rights to Europeans over non-Europeans to settle in the lands of the Ottoman Empire on the grounds of their greater technical

capacities, [and he] was certain that such occupation would be licit" (Pagden 2015, 139). Such settlers were "bound to accept the sovereignty of the Sultan" even as they had rights according to natural law to settle (139).

Gentili helped formulate the deeply consequential theory of "improvement,"[34] which became the key and supposedly objective grounds for declaring land terra nullius, even lands of the sovereign Ottoman sultan (Gentili 1877, 131). "Improvements" allowed Gentili both to recognize that the sultan had sovereign authority and to argue that it was legal for Western settlers, who supposedly had the capacity (due to their being Western Christians) for "improvements," to take up residence on "unimproved" land. Large tracts of territory of the Ottoman Empire were effectively "unused," jurists stated (Kingsbury 1998, 713–23, 723n, as cited in Pagden 2003, 196n34).

That "unimproved" land—which was, in fact, used and owned in ways the jurists could not see—could be claimed by Europeans as terra nullius, and thus "settlement" to "improve the land" was legitimate. But it would be illegitimate for Western civilized nations to ignore the sultan's rule or to set aside the multiple treaties that supplicant Western nations had signed with him. Terra nullius, in short, was decoupled from territorial and settler colonialism. The sultan's sovereignty was legitimate, but he had no sovereignty over his domains. Nor would aspiring nations emerging from regions of the Ottoman Empire. This decoupling of territory from sovereignty, together with the granting of rights for outsiders to settle under the name of improvement, is another hallmark of the semicivilized.

Close attention must also be paid to finance and its workings in the case of the semicivilized. In the Ottoman Empire, finance was directly linked to the internal politics of the Ottoman Empire even when the power of the empire was at its apex (Kafadar 1986). The Ottoman Empire was an "Empire of Debt" (Yaycıoğlu 2022). This does not mean that the empire was indebted to the West, although the structure of finance would flip that way in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rather, it means that political, kin, and commercial relationships were interwoven through a medium of debt (and credit). Looking at these multiple functions of finance, credit, and debt can help us make sense of a common situation of structural indebtedness in which the ongoing flows of credit-debt relations were locked into systemic extraction, immobility, and nonsovereignty—whether in Egypt or Puerto Rico, or in intergenerational unpayable debt in the United States.

This system was fully financialized in ways that seem familiar to a twenty-first century eye. Finance was linked to the ongoing mobility of humans carrying letters of credit and specie across space. Brokers mediated nodes

of commerce across multiple levels of social, kin, and political worlds and conducted with different kinds of currencies and financial instruments. Part of this credit-debt nexus faced inward, mediating relations of power in the most direct of ways. Finance was the "lifeblood of bureaucracy," of the state bureaucracy managed by the grand vizier. Finance was also an engine of growth in state capacity (Clay 2000, 86). Finance mediated power struggles between the Porte, the seat of the imperial bureaucracy, and the palace and its own distinct sources of wealth (Eldem 1999). In Egypt as well, relations of credit and debt were at the center of politics long before the nineteenth century. After years of growing indebtedness, territorial losses, and the military defeats of the Ottoman Empire, matters took a more decisive turn in 1875, when the Ottomans suspended payment on a portion of their external debt.

In 1881, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA) was established.[35] Unlike previous ad hoc schemes, from the beginning, the OPDA rendered official the final disentanglement of credits and debts that underlay the Empire of Debt. It stripped away as well the specific link of a financial instrument to a particular project. Debt now stood for the collective interests of the (mostly foreign) bondholders of Ottoman debt, who gained the right to interfere—without the benefits and costs of occupation—in the workings of the local economy. The situation resembles the "dollar diplomacy" in the Americas after the United States lost interest in the powers and liabilities of territorial conquest (Rosenberg 2003). Here, too, fiscal powers of the state are devolved to an outside, more powerful country that assumes the right to revalue debt.

Ontologies of debt in the Ottoman Empire offer important lessons for considering the politics of the semicivilized today. The semicivilized were a "great social laboratory" of the social sciences (El Shakry 2007) and coloniality. Global commerce moved through channels of the Ottoman Empire long before any theory of capitalism or imperialism was penned. Finance in the Ottoman Empire contradicts classic models of imperialism, in which excess capital from overproduction in core capitalist countries is the source of "finance" elsewhere. From this perspective, it is not finance or debt per se that locked Egypt and the region into the straitjacket of the "semicivilized." The politics of valuation and revaluation must be considered as well. "Finance is composed of processes that make debt valuable" (Poon and Wosnitzer 2012, 253). The work entailed in making debts of all kinds valuable—and disvalued—is the underbelly of finance. Employees of banks, the OPDA, or Egyptian banks or debt overseers are sometimes stuck with the labor of

sorting things out and deciding what has value and what does not. When valuation schemas rapidly change, the consequences can be severe.

Sometimes the messy and bloody business of revaluation is framed as necessary and objective "austerity." Sometimes, like in Egypt during the 2020s, it appears like inflation and exchange-rate collapse, even as assets quietly change hands behind the scenes. "Financial relationships," economist Perry Mehrling (2017) has said, are not about "mediating something else on the 'real' side of the economy." Rather, they are "the constitutive relationships of the whole system" (1). In times of mass revaluation, investors can end up penniless and die by suicide; mistakes can ruin the lives of countless invisible others. Radical upheaval in valuation schemes can take on the neutral attributes of finance. But the political is never fully cleansed away. This is well known by the "semicivilized" who suffer the indignities of structural indebtedness without end, whether in Egypt, Puerto Rico, or the United States.

On Shaky Grounds

Egypt's geographic location has long attracted the interest of powers trying to control global flows of commerce, militaries, and value. The Suez Canal is but the most famous and consequential channel through Egypt. Plans to transform the Isthmus of Suez into the Suez Canal date back to pharaonic times. Those early plans were revived by French Saint-Simonian engineers in the 1830s, and as we will see in chapter 2, the canal remains important in Egypt's performance of sovereignty. Engineering of all kinds of channels for the movement of people, goods, and armies along railways, roads, and canals entailed associated and interlinked innovations of finance and engineering. Chapter 1 demonstrates the continued strategic place of control over channels of mobility in Cairo today as part of urban planning for counterinsurgency, international tourism, and state power. Passageways and channels were important in the provisioning and governing of the Ottoman Empire and in the making of all kinds of social infrastructures and commons in Cairo that are another focus of this book.

But Egypt itself was also a channel—to the "crown jewel" of British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. Since the Ottoman Empire was not colonized, other arrangements and innovations in finance, international law, and engineering were found and imposed. Building infrastructure is a key part of this story, and thus appeared with the very opening of this book in a story about conflicts over building the road from Jerusalem to Jericho in

which my grandfather played a small part. But as important as the literature on infrastructure from the Middle East has been, the now over-extended concept cannot explain everything. In this book, I foreground channels over infrastructure, drawing as well on debates in Great Britain in the sixteenth century about the rise of commerce. Such concepts may seem far removed from Egypt in the twenty-first century, but they are not. After all, the oldest faculty of economics and accounting in Egypt is still named the "Faculty of Commerce" (*tijara*).

Commerce denotes more than what we think of as "business." It was theorized long before the notion of "economics" came into being. Commerce encompassed communication and transformation. Commerce meant the "affayres of business" (T. Thomas 1587). It was also a form of liberty: "an entercourse or libertie to cary marchandyse from one place to another" and to sell it (Elyot 1538, 1542). Moving from one place to another was a central part of commerce. Commerce was a spatial relation and a form of communication. Commerce was "communication for buying and selling, entercourse of merchandise from one place to another" (T. Thomas 1587).

As a dual human imperative to exchange merchandise and communicate with others, commerce was enshrined in natural law. Commerce was an agentive force, driving men and corporations to ends divine and terrible. Commerce was also central to life in the Ottoman Empire; but this kind of commerce was inseparable from violence and the waging of new kinds of war financed by new kinds of debt. Hugo Grotius argued in the early seventeenth century that the oceans were channels for commerce and, as such, a common—in the sense that no one nation or sovereign power should control it. This challenged Portuguese claims to vast sweeps of the New World under the papal bull *Inter caetera*, issued by Alexander VI in 1493.

The concept of channels reappears in the theory I draw on in this book. It is central to communication theory and features prominently in the classic writings of Roman Jakobson ([1960] 1990) that I draw on in my analysis of social infrastructures of communicative channels among the urban masses of the semicivilized. This notion of channels of commerce and communication will reappear in the chapters that follow and in my analysis of the social infrastructures of communicative channels and the urban commons of the semicivilized. This adds other dimensions to discussions of infrastructure that focus more on roads, bridges, telegraph lines, electric and water meters, and more. Such infrastructures appear across our story, inseparable from systems of communication, commerce, and commonalities that create the commons: as resource, concept, people, and platform of revolt.

Twice colonized by European powers—by France for three years in 1798, and by Great Britain for much longer in variable arrangements after 1881—Egypt is no doubt a postcolonial country. But the concept of postcolonialism is not sufficient to grasp the complexities of Egypt's legal, sovereign, and cultural conditions either in the past or today. Following the French failure to absorb Egypt into its liberal imperialist French Republic of Egypt (Cole 2007), British, French, and Ottoman imperial strategists alike were reluctant to even try to claim sovereignty over it (Genell 2013, 2016). Even so, Egypt's strategic location as a passageway to the East left it vulnerable to incursions by powers seeking to capture the benefits this afforded and made it the object of many fantasies and plans pertaining to channels and infrastructure. This began long before the late nineteenth century, when administrative, financial, and policing responsibilities were coordinated among three imperial powers—the British, the French, and the Ottomans (Genell 2016; Shlala 2018).

In such a context, it was a complex matter to sort out which bodies were associated with which sovereign, to which part of the legal system they belonged, and who was responsible for any debts or credits they had assumed. Here it helps to focus on citizenship as practiced (Hanley 2016, 278) rather than assuming that there is a unitary relation of "the citizen" to "the state," or a singular history moving from territorial colonialism to postcolonialism and the postcolonial state. Chapter 3 looks at multiple forms of citizenship as practiced through workings of the Egyptian Mixed Courts, an Egyptian institution that grew out of the Ottoman capitulations to sort out differently lived sovereignty relationships, within ties both commercial and personal.

But sorting things out denotes more than categorizing who belongs where under the law and deciding who is extraterritorial and who is local. It points to an ongoing, embodied practice of being local, together, and in common. Ethnography can show us how simple, everyday practices create and reproduce what I call social infrastructures of communicative channels that run across and through multiple nodes of distributed agency. Themselves a commons, these channels are an essential infrastructure for political economy writ large as well as for the sustenance of collective life. As we will see across chapters 4 and 5, these social infrastructures that long functioned as a commons of the urban masses became increasingly visible and accessible as a platform for profit at the end of the twentieth century, when different kinds of adventurers roamed the world to civilize and profit from the semicivilized.

Social infrastructures were then integrated into platforms of revolt in the 2010s. At that time, mass revolt spread around the region as life became

more precarious, in a trend that has drastically accelerated in the ensuing years. The politics of "resistance everywhere" stood on the same ground as ideologies of productivist labor and endless growth—the ground was seen as something stable and unchanging for people to stand on, feet firmly planted, fists upraised. Yet, that stability was an illusion. As the ground of this political economy that supposedly replaced imperial domains and their exterritorial/commoner divides began to recede, the politics of the commons shifted as well. For me, the notion of the isthmus as a channel connecting two separate areas of land became a productive metaphor for thinking differently about polity and ground, and the different ways in which they can intersect, a topic I turn to in chapter 6.[36]

This division between extraterritorials and locals is a generative rubric through which to consider politics in regions of the semicivilized. But it is more. In a time of climate catastrophe, assumptions of stable ground, territoriality, and territorial sovereignty that linger in the usual formulations of colonialism, postcolonialism, and the commons have become untenable. What happens to the commons on the shaken grounds of a world in which territorialism cannot be taken for granted and in which climate destruction has upended the notion of stable ground altogether? In such a time, the notion of the commoner, a local, as rooted in place or as part of a polity stretched across the space of a loosely regulated empire, takes on increasing salience. The battle to defend the possibility of life itself in a town, a community, and on earth has never been starker.

NOTES

Introduction: On the Move

1 For multiple ways in which person, community, and territory can be related in different idioms of power in today's Middle East, and the importance of connectivity, mobility, and local categories of belonging in any project to transcend assumptions of territoriality, see Antrim (2012 and 2018).

2 As Frederick Cooper put it, the concept of colonialism in postcolonialism studies is a sweeping term that is "spatially diffuse and temporally spread out over five centuries" (2005, 16). For use related to Egypt, see Huber (2012, 142).

3 Here I think of Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (2008, 1) and the difference between adding a category like "bisexual" into the middle of the "homo/heterosexual definition" in a way that bolsters the logic of gender binaries by adding a "minoritizing view," versus unsettling the entire constitutive logic of binary gender oppositions (10).

4 For some works that influenced my thinking about extraterritoriality and the semicivilized, see Genell (2016); on Bodin, Grotius, and Hobbes, see Bartelson (2011); on history of international law and the "illusion of sovereignty," see Kennedy (1997); on the "standard of civilization" in international law, see Tzouvala (2020); on dividual sovereignty in the history of political theory in a way that made clear to me that the Ottoman Empire was no "exception," see Wilson (2008); on extraterritoriality, the capitulations, and international law,

see Özsu (2016a and 2016b) and Margolies et al. (2019); on extraterritoriality and sovereignty, see Kayaoğlu (2010) and Antony Anghie's (2002) classic work on international law, colonialism, and his encounter with the Mandates. The legal infrastructure of commerce that is sometimes called the capitulations, or discussed more broadly in terms of extraterritoriality, is also key; see Slys (2014), Özsu (2016a, 2016b), Svantesson (2015), and Pal (2020).

5 Today we usually speak of *extraterritoriality*, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this word was used interchangeably with *exterritoriality* (Liu 1925, 18).

6 Extraterritorial rights had been an important dynamic of early modern empire; the accumulation of rights to extraterritorial privileges of Europeans expanded without overt military intervention or legal concessions. This was a dynamic of the "accumulation of extraterritoriality" internal to the logics of the system (Pal 2020).

7 On Egyptian debt and finance from the perspective of global capitalism, see Jakes (2020).

8 This book contributes to literature building on the framework of coloniality/modernity associated with Mignolo (2007), Quijano (1992), Quijano and Ennis (2000), and Wynter (2003) by bringing into focus the place of the Ottomans, the barbarians, and the semicivilized in formative debates of "modernity" and political theory. As Maldonado-Torres (2007) notes, coloniality is different from the assumption of unitary sovereignty as a juridical-legal status by a colonizing power and "survives colonialism" (244). But coloniality is "not simply the aftermath or the residual form of any given . . . colonial relation." It is forever renewed in conditions of the present, even as it was generated in the past. It is linked to the "discovery and conquest of the Americas" in the sixteenth century and to the associated invention of the concept of the primitive (243). Coloniality is "constitutive" of modernity and the European Enlightenment as its "darker side" (44). At the same time, critics of coloniality have pointed to the need to move beyond the framework of coloniality/modernity (D. Thomas 2022), which focus on the semicivilized can help us to do.

9 The noun *civilization* was derived from much older words—*civil* and *civility*—that implied a notion of culture and manners. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "civility"; Fisch (1992, 721); Febvre (1930); and Benveniste (1953). For a key eighteenth-century use of *civilization*, see Ferguson (1782).

10 According to Aristotle, "barbarians" were "slaves by nature" because they did not live in free cities but were ruled by god-kings living in palaces, who govern them as if they were slaves (Pocock, 2009, 11–12).

11 This is similar to what Johannes Fabian (2014) would call the denial of coevalness.

12 For a different approach to colonialism, the law, and dehumanization in Egypt, see Esmeir (2012).

13 'Uways titled one of his books "the history that I carry on my back" (literally shoulders). 'Uways uses a case-study method to gain insight into the great people of Cairo and their relation to history and collectivity as well as to "hear the sounds of silent people" (Nagasawa 2014, 74).

14 See Rohrer (2007) for a review of critiques that notes at least twelve different meanings of *embodiment*.

15 On the *hara* and a sophisticated analysis of the relation between popular and official culture in Egypt and the links of culture to politics, see Mehrez (2008).

16 Relations being reworked in the emergence of sovereignty were between king (or emperor) and land-owning magnates; between king and emperor; between the secular ruler and church authority; among kings; and among states (Hinsley 1966).

17 For a recent discussion of alternative approaches to sovereignty, see D. Thomas (2022). For a brilliant analysis of "layered sovereignty," see Nora Barakat (2023). On finance and dividual sovereignty, see Derri (2021a, 2021b). See also Audra Simpson's (2014) related analysis of the "nested sovereignty" practiced by the British Empire and its reappropriation by the Mohawk Nation as part of a politics of refusal.

18 To put that short sentence in context: "Sovereignty is a term which, in international law, indicates a well-ascertained assemblage of separate powers or privileges . . . there is not, nor has there ever been, anything in international law to prevent some of those rights being lodged with one possessor and some with another. Sovereignty has always been regarded as divisible" (Keene 2004, 78).

19 Sovereignty was also divisible in British and Dutch imperial systems in the East, where the British and Dutch plugged themselves into "existing imperial hierarchies, where the principle of suzerainty was already established" (Keene 2004, 93). See also Samara Esmeir's (2012) analysis of the hybrid nature of colonial law in Egypt.

20 A new generation of Ottoman Empire and Middle East historians has shed a great deal of light on dynamics of dividual sovereignty, extraterritoriality, global finance, international law, and property regimes in the Ottoman Empire. See, for example, N. E. Barakat (2015, 2023), Derri (2021a, 2021b), Dolbee (2022), Can and Genell (2020), Can and Low (2016), Genell (2016, 2019), and Nye (2023).

21 For helpful summaries of some of that literature, see Anand, Gupta, and Appel (2018), and Larkin (2013).

22 For a related line of questioning, see Yarimar Bonilla's work on "unsettling sovereignty" (2017) and "non-sovereign futures" (2015). For a semiotic analysis of ground and grounds in the context of archeology, see Kockelman (2005, 2012).

23 Such a situation is not unique to these empires. Passports were not always used by territorial nation-states, as Torpey (2018) reminds us, and some states like Israel have no declared borders.

24 "No problem which confronted the Lausanne Conference [which followed up on aspects of ending the war and the Empire that were not settled at Versailles] contributed more to its difficulties than . . . the capitulations," wrote Lucius Thayer (1923, 207), a diplomat ("formerly engaged in work with the Near East Relief in Anatolia") whose work is cited in literature on the capitulations to this day, about the implications of the abrogation of the capitulations for the United States.

25 Cairo is an important node of a great Arabo-Islamic literary tradition that once included millions of distinct books (El Shamsy 2022, 8). Those books, like archives from the dust, faced constant dangers from the "archenemies of the written word—humidity, fire, war, insects, and censorship" (8) as well as the dangers of organized, legal, extractive theft via the free market. Here I refer to what Shamsy calls the "book drain to Europe," which intensified with Napoleon and the "Orientalists who accompanied Napoleon on his invasion of Egypt" (10) during his travels across the Mediterranean on the great ship *L'Orient*, which landed at Alexandria in 1798.

26 In the words of Malcolm X: "President Gamal Abdul Nasser was so right when he said that there are three circles: the Arab, the African and the Islamic. Only others are not as far-sighted as he is to see it." See Alhassen (2015, 16fn18, citing "Malcolm X on Islam, Africa and the US," *Egyptian Gazette*, August 17, 1964, 3). Alhassen notes that Malcolm X referred to Nasser as his "president" in this interview. The interviewer noted that Malcolm X was not only an admirer of Nasser; he was also a personal friend of many African leaders.

27 For a lucid account of this process for the non-specialist, see especially Fahmy (2009), and on the Ottoman firman of 1841 that gave Mehmet Ali "what he had been striving for ever since he landed in Egypt in 1801: an unambiguous pledge by the Ottoman sultan, backed by all major European powers, that he would continue to rule his prized province until his death, and that thereafter his descendants would inherit the governorship of Egypt and its enhanced wealth" (50).

28 On this world from the perspective of Sephardic Jewish families and their archives, see Stein (2016, 2019).

29 For some important work on settlement, property, and sovereignty in Palestine in the past and present relevant to my concerns, see R. Barakat (2018a, 2018b), Dallasheh (2015), Rabie (2021), Seikaly (2015, 2019), and Salamanca et al. (2012).

30 The Ottomans were also deeply engaged in theory and praxis of international law by the nineteenth century. See, for example, Özsu (2016b), and Can and Low (2016).

31 On Gentili and his life, see Van Der Molen ([1937] 1968), and Kingsbury (1998, 713–14). For English editions of some of his most important works, see Gentili ([1594] 1924) and Gentili ([1612] 1933) In what follows, I rely heavily on interpretations of Gentili by Wagner (2012), Kingsbury (1998), and Kingsbury and Sraumann (2010).

32 This pertains to the framework of the "English School" of international law. For a different assessment of Gentili and the law of nations and sovereignty, see Peter Schröder's chapter "Vitoria, Gentili, Bodin," 163–65, in Kingsbury and Straumann (2010).

33 This is not to idealize the law of nations. Some of the most overtly racist language about the semicivilized came from this tradition.

34 The theory of improvement is usually attributed to John Locke and his *Two Treatises on Government*, written in 1660 and published in 1689. See Locke (1960).

35 For one starting point on the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, see Eldem (2005).

36 See D. Thomas (2022) on sand, beach, and shoals as "in between spaces that disturb the certainties of territory and mapping, the colonial cartographies of sovereignty, and the divisions between Indigenous and African futures" and as "spaces, and frames, that might help us generate a 'de-colonial,' rather than postcolonial, notion of sovereignty" (250, citing Bonilla [2017] and King [2019]).

Chapter 1. Fixing Space, Moving People

1 The Egyptian constitution stipulates that the government must be located in Cairo. As such, planners of the New Administrative Capital stretched the geographical lines and borders of Cairo to insure it would be included in the expanded bounds of Cairo, rather than an independent entity. My thanks to Muhammad Addakhakhny for alerting me to this.

2 For analysis of the Egyptian military economy, see Sayigh (2019, 2022).

3 A substantial literature exists on the unfolding, meaning, and significance of the January 25, 2011, Revolution in Egypt. To touch on some relevant writings from and of the period, see Attalah (2019), Abd el-Fattah (2022),