HISTORY AND MEMORY OF BANDITS IN MODERN EGYPT
THE CONTORVERSY OF ADHAM AL-SHARQAWI

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By

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HISTORY AND MEMORY OF BANDITS IN MODERN EGYPT
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ABSTRACT

In October 1921 Adham al-Sharqawi, one of Egypt’s most famous bandits, was shot dead by secret police troops after a manhunt which had lasted for several months. Adham’s “crimes”, such as his brigand attack on British trains and the assassination of some British officers, occupied public sphere for months. His victims also included notables from the countryside. Adham’s complicated character and his organized raids on government symbols represented a matter of contestation between the official narrative (daily newspapers and police reports) and popular memory (peasant’s ballads or mawawil).

While official records commented on his death as a triumph for justice and security and an end of “tyrant” who had frightened and terrified the countryside, he was memoralized in the popular memory as a heroic figure and noble outlaw who fought courageously for the rights of the poor and for bringing vengeance upon oppressive landlords and colonial officials.

This dichotomy of the criminal and the hero contained within a single individual is inspiring to rethink the pillars of Egyptian high culture and the bourgeois legal, moral and social categories that dominate history.
In this thesis, I focus on the category of bandit and aim to present a critical perspective on modernity and nationalism in Egypt from a new point of departure: criminal subjectivity. In other words, I am dealing with the questions of how crime is defined, interpreted, lessened, and, more crucially - how criminal subjectivity is created. I argue that the defining, imagining and portraying of criminals plays a critical part in the process of identity formation and the regulation of citizens - those who are the shareholders of an imagined community referred to as the nation. The idea of the nation is always imagined as both a virtuous and pure entity, thus it is based on a number of dichotomies such as, us versus them, law versus crime, order versus chaos and citizens versus criminals.

I trackback to a crucial period in the modern history of Egypt, between the eruption of the national revolution against British colonialism in 1919 and the attainment of quasi-independence after the declaration of the constitutional monarchy in 1923. This time period witnessed a relative upsurge in crime rates, especially in the countryside, and the question of fighting and eliminating crime became, to a great extent, a national concern connected to national security, public morality and the establishment of a modern society.
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Leaving Egypt to start my graduate career in the United States and completing this thesis would not have been possible without the generous help, sincere support, and limitless patience of my mother, sister, and brother and my extended family. I hope that these pages reflect my gratitude and love for them.

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Introduction

“A philosopher produces ideas, a poet poems, a clergyman sermons, a professor compendia and so on ... The criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law, and with this also the professor who gives lectures on criminal law ... The criminal moreover produces the whole of the police and of criminal justice, constables, judges, hangmen, juries, etc.”

Karl Marx, “Economic Manuscripts: Marx’s Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63.”

In October 1921 Adham al-Sharqawi was shot dead by Egyptian secret police troops after a manhunt which had lasted for several months. Adham’s crimes, such as his brigand attack on British trains and the assassination of some British officers, occupied public sphere for months. His victims also included notables from the countryside. Adham’s complicated character and his organized raids on government symbols represented a matter of contestation between the official narrative (daily newspapers and police reports) and popular memory (peasant’s ballads or mawawil). The newspapers commented on his death as “the death of the big brigand” who had frightened the al-Beheirah province and terrified its residents. A long article in al-Ahram cited “Fairy tales about Adham overwhelmed the residents; it was enough to mention his name to panic anyone. People are no longer following the political conflict between Saa’d Zaghloul and his Rivalries, nor the cotton prices craze, as they are obsessed with Adham’s news.”

Cairene newspapers presented Adham as an “outlaw”, “hitman” and “tyrant.” His murder, therefore, was perceived by the bourgeoisie as a triumph for justice and security.

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2 “Taghyat al-Beheirah”, al-Ahram, October 4, 1921.

3 Ibid.
Popular memory, however, represented in the ballad of Adham al-Sharqawi, “Mawal Adham al-Sharqawi,” described him as a “lion” who fought courageously for the rights of the poor and for bringing vengeance upon tyrant landlords and police officials. This dichotomy of the criminal and the hero contained within a single individual is inspiring to rethink the pillars of Egyptian high culture and the bourgeois legal, moral and social categories that dominate history.

Figure (1): Adham’s murder.4

Problematic:

The bourgeoisie tendency to marginalize the efforts and participation of the poorer classes in the revolution and to discredit the role of bandits is deeply inculcated in modern Egyptian history. In this thesis I focus on the category of bandit and aim to present a critical perspective on modernity and nationalism in Egypt from a new point of departure: criminal subjectivity. In other words, I am dealing with the questions of how crime is defined, interpreted, lessened, and, more crucially - how criminal subjectivity is

4 Al-Lat’if al-Musawwarah, October, 31, 1921.
created. I argue that the defining, imagining and portraying of criminals plays a critical part in the process of identity formation and the regulation of citizens—those who are the shareholders of an imagined community referred to as the nation. The idea of the nation is always imagined as both a virtuous and pure entity, thus it is based on a number of dichotomies such as, us versus them, law versus crime, order versus chaos and citizens versus criminals.

I trackback to a crucial period in the modern history of Egypt, between the eruption of the national revolution against British colonialism in 1919 and the attainment of quasi-independence after the declaration of the constitutional monarchy in 1923. This time period witnessed a relative upsurge in crime rates, especially in the countryside, and the question of fighting and eliminating crime became, to a great extent, a national concern connected to national security, public morality and the establishment of a modern society.

The rise of bandits’ raids on estates and attacks on landlords and police officers became a nationalist concern not only with regards to maintaining order and the rule of law, but also to disciplining the peasantry and to perpetuating their domination by the central state and by urban elites. In addition to the reaction of the state, aristocracy and nationalist intelligentsia to the rural insurgency, the countryside became a cornerstone in the rise of social sciences in modern Egypt. Rural crime reflected the ideological hegemony that permeates the urban discourse of politics, law and sciences.

Instead of examining the biographies of the nationalist elite or studying the records of official negotiations—which are still indispensably important—I will narrate the story of the nation based on the biography of a bandit, as it was documented in police
reports, courts verdicts, judges’ memoirs, colonial commentators eports, national administrative archives and newspapers. Crime plays a twofold role in my argument. On the one hand, I am studying how crime became an object of analysis and observation in the writings of political reformers, police chiefs and criminologists. On the other hand, I will investigate how these political and scientific discourses created crime as an object of knowledge.

Studying the history of crime in modern Egypt sheds light on forgotten stories regarding the nation and its fragments, and about modernity and its discontents. The history of crime completes the missing piece of the history of law and order. Correspondingly, criminal subjectivity was not only considered as being on the social and legal margins of society, with criminals identified as deviants and outlaws, but also on the moral and political margins of the nation as an imagined community.

**Literature review:**

The controversy of bandits was eloquently discussed and analyzed by the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in two remarkable works, *Primitive Rebels* in 1959 and *Bandits* in 1969. In these texts Hobsbawm addressed the relation between questions of class hegemony, state domination and the definition of crime. These pioneering books discussed the phenomenon of “social bandits” who express social protest against land lords and ruling elites in rural communities, and who are therefore considered outlaws and criminals by the elites while being supported and protected by the peasants.

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Social bandits resemble the model of Robin Hood, the noble robber who stole from the rich to help the poor. Hobsbawm, accordingly, assessed the radical potential of bandits’ insurgencies and considered their robberies an expression of social discontent against dominating classes in pre-capitalist societies. He described their actions as “pre-political” to distinguish them from modern organized protest movements that translate their social discontent into political demands and from radical movements and parties who appear in industrialized societies and aim at overthrowing the exploitative social system as a whole. According to Hobsbawn, the main element that distinguishes political action from pre-political banditry is the class or group consciousness that dictates a strategy for class struggle and political mobilization. The social bandits in most of the cases studied by Hobsbawn lacked the mobilization of subalterns or peasants.

Hobsbawm’s view is echoed in many studies, such as that of E. P. Thompson’s 1975 *Whigs and Hunters* which tackled the problematic definitions of crime in eighteenth century England. Thompson argued that the state turned law enforcement in favor of landlords and sanctioned their claims against suspects who were peasants or workers; the crime was aligned with both the interests and perceptions of those who own property. Analysis of death sentence rates in London between 1750 and 1776 demonstrates that criminal law included a wide range of thefts and aggressions against private property under the hanging punishment.

The social bandit scholarship later emerged in non-western contexts, specifically in India where during the nineteenth century colonial authorities launched massive

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campaigns to eliminate bandits. This included their codification in 1871 of a notorious “criminal tribes law” targeting certain tribes and outcaste groups thought to be habitual outlaws. The category of bandits was known in India as “thuggess” who were defined in colonial discourse as “a fraternity of ritual stranglers who preyed on travelers along the highway.”

Ranajit Guha, the pioneering historian of subaltern studies, took the work of Hobsbawm and Thompson into consideration in his analysis of peasant insurgency in Bengal. However, Guha criticized the concept of “pre-political” that Hobsbawm used to describe the social bandits. The concept of pre-political, according to Guha, dictates the western experience of political change as an authoritative model applicable throughout the world and downplays the agency of “the people without history” outside the western and industrial world. Guha presented crime and rebellion as two contrasting codes for defining the same phenomenon. The peasants considered the dacoit of Lodhas in western Bengal as mythic champions of justice who kidnapped or stole from greedy moneylenders, officials, and landlords; conversely, persons with property and power described the dacoits as terrifying threats to public order.

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9 - They were thought to deceive their victims by joining them, and then they would strangle, plunder and bury them. The thuggees would allegedly befriend travelers and gain their trust before launching their attacks. This aspect distinguishes thuggees from the similar concept of “dacoity,” which means simple armed robbery. Dacoity has similarities with the terms brigand and bandit in the European context. The conventional perception considered thuggee as an ancient Hindu practice, relying on omens and a secret language, supposedly using their victim as a sacrifice to the goddess Kali. See: Kim A. Wagner, Thuggee: Banditry and the British in Early Nineteenth-Century India (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.
12 - Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, 77-68.
In the same vein, Kim Wagner studies the encounter between thuggees and colonial power in nineteenth century India. He explains the phenomenon of thuggees in light of western economic and military expansion in the Indian subcontinent and the political chaos and socioeconomic disruption following the decline of the Mughal Empire. Wagner argues that Hobsbawm’s model of primitive rebels fails to comprehend the relationship between state, peasants and banditry outside the European context. Hobsbawm’s bandits were by definition outside the range of power; their rise reflects the weakness or instability of the state. Moreover, the Indian thugees were considered as sort of mercenaries related to landlords or the zamindars in a client-patron relationship. The thugs received protection and subsistence and in return the zamindars received a substantial share of the loot the thugs brought back from their expeditions. The connection between dacoits and peasants was not only one made by the Zamindars. Peasants indeed supported dacoits in different ways, such as harboring them in their villages, hiding their stolen goods and refusing to report a dacoity. The persons who reported dacoits or gave evidence against them risked severe punishment by both zamindars and dacoits.

Anton Blok criticized Hobsbawm’s model of romanticizing the bandits and obscuring the complicated relationships that integrated them not only with peasants but with landlords as well. Blok’s study on the Sicilian Mafia shows that “social bandits” can be recruited by landlords and authorities to work as guards, informants and policemen against peasants. The same criticism was adopted by PJ Vanderwood who argued that Mexican bandits were “self-interested individuals . . . who found themselves excluded
from the possibilities and opportunities, not to mention the benefits, of society at large, and who promoted disorder as a lever to enter a system reserved for a few."¹³

Block’s criticisms of Hobsbawm resonate in the work of Nathan Brown on Egypt. Brown also sees collaboration between bandits and landlords and traces the frequent complaints sent by peasants and small land owners to the press about collusion between the bandits and village mayors. He adds that in Egypt many notables express interest in hiring bandits to loot lands and crops of competitors. In addition, Brown developed the social bandits approach by identifying how the question of fighting banditry was symbiotically connected with state building. The crisis of banditry, according to him, was invented in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the Egyptian state defined it as a concern of national security (al-Amn al-'Am) in order to build a more intrusive state or “to make its presence felt directly in every village in Egypt.”¹⁴

**Thesis structure:**

This thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter analyzes the historical background of banditry in Egypt from the British occupation in the late nineteenth century until the nationalist revolt against colonial rule in 1919. I investigate the dialectical relationship between banditry and law, economy and criminology, and portray how banditry emerged not only as a consequence of capitalist penetration, violent modernization and military invasion, but also as a constitutive phenomenon that impacted the modernization of the police system, the reformation of the cotton industry and the creation and protection of private property. I begin with the British response to the

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expansion of gangs and bandits in the countryside after the defeat of Egyptian army in the al-Tal al-Kabir battle in 1882. Then, I move to the relationship between cotton cultivation and banditry and how the social division of labor, which evolved with the cotton economy, restructured the lives of peasants and the working class, and also influenced bandits and brigands and their activities. I conclude the first chapter with a discussion of how banditry was evident in the application of modern western, criminological theories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as those of born criminals and criminal classes. Throughout the chapter I focus in particular on the al-Beheirah Province, in the west of the Nile Delta, where the story of Adham al-Sharqawi took place.

In the second chapter, I present an autobiography of Adham al-Sharqawi and attempt to narrate his life and dichotomous identity, depending on both oral history and archival resources such as newspapers, court records, police reports and anthropological surveys of al-Beheirah Province. The main obstacle in dealing with Adham’s story is the lack of original records of his case in either the Egyptian National archives or the British archives and Public Record Office. Tracing Adham’s truth, therefore, is a painstaking mission, dependent on collecting proliferating narratives and contradicting stories about his life, imprisonment and death. I collected several interviews from his ancestors, prison mates, folkloric historians and both the members and the rivals of his family.

I conclude the thesis by situating Adham, and the phenomenon of banditry in general, within the political context that followed the 1919 revolt against the British occupation and which concluded with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and a semi-liberal regime that maintained the bourgeoisie hegemony and reconciled with colonialism.
Chapter One: the history of banditry

1- Colonialism and its discontents

Brigandage and anti-colonial resistance

The defeat of the Urabi Revolt (1881-1882) and the quick liquidation of anti-colonial resistance unleashed unprecedented waves of crime, violence and fragmented social resistance all over the Egyptian countryside. The national front, led by Urabi’s army, unified dispossessed peasants, members of Bedouin tribes, migrant workers and small land owners. This front initiated both organized and atomized social disruption of repressive colonial and modernizing projects. Peasants, in response to the military defeat, directed their arms to restore the confiscated lands they lost because of debts to foreign moneylenders and land companies before the revolt. They also looted private properties and large estates owned by landlords, and attacked trains and British headquarters.

The province of al-Beheirah, specifically, witnessed a wide upsurge of brigandage, highway robberies and plundering by organized gangs.\(^{15}\) It was remarkable that the place where crime and brigandage was rampant was the last territory occupied by the British. After the fall of the Egyptian army in al-Tel al-Kabir (in al-Sharqiyya Province), al-Beheirah was the last front that was still struggling against occupation. The province was flooded with thousands of Bedouin, peasant, and fighter volunteers from all over the country who marched to confront the British battalions, and al-Beheirah also became a gathering spot for large amounts of supplies and ammunitions. The British army failed to invade the province and suffered five weeks of painstaking fighting in the cities of Kafr

al-Dawwar and Damanhur. The fortified cities and villages of al-Beheirah and the province’s difficult geographical terrain (swamps and hills were prevalent in al-Beheirah) made the invasion seem impossible to the British before they took over Cairo.\textsuperscript{16} After the troops surrendered in Cairo and the arrest of Urabi, the resistance in al-Beheirah fell apart and the fighters and thousands of military volunteers and revolutionaries had to flee the province, scattering to its desert frontiers.\textsuperscript{17} Many peasants and Bedouins refused to hand over the arms they fought with and smuggled them for various purposes such as waging vendettas, protecting their homes and defending the lands they reclaimed from moneylenders and foreign landowners. The smuggled armaments and the rifles hidden in peasants’ homes spurred the bloody scene after the liquidation of the revolt.

\textbf{“Commissions of Brigandage” and the reforming of the police}

To combat the outbreak of brigands and rural crime, the khedive Tawfiq initiated a decree to establish the “Commissions of Brigandage” or \textit{Qumisiyunat al-Ashqiya’} in 1884. The commissions were extraordinary tribunals that oversaw investigations, detection and arrest of brigands and suspicious villagers. The decree mandated provincial officials to suspend the legal regulations and juridical procedures and adopt instead any exceptional means necessary to arrest suspects and prove their crimes. The tribunals extended their scope to include rural crime in general and left the interior ministry to operate its work with free hands without recourse to the parquet. Provincial governors and policemen used torture to extract confessions and convicted many peasants with

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\textsuperscript{16} - Muhammad Feisal Abdel-Men’im, \textit{Ma’arek al-Thawarah al-’Urabiyyah} (Cairo, Mu’assaset Dar al-Ta’awun, 1982), 141-7.
\textsuperscript{17} - Ibid. The revolutionary moment changed the landscape completely; the smuggling routes in the western desert that were employed to connect Abi- Qir port on the Mediterranean with the al-Fayyum and Upper Egypt became a line of support to resistance that fed revolutionaries with rifles, supplies and ammunition.
\end{flushright}
scanty evidence. Between 1885 and 1886, the Khedive signed eighty three execution
orders for brigands convicted by the Commissions.

British officials perceived the Commissions of Brigandage as typical of the
arbitrary laws, personal sovereignty and despotic power exercised by leaders in Egypt.
Viscount Alfred Milner stated, for example, that “the history of the Commissions of
Brigandage shows how strangely civilization and barbarism may still exist cheek by jowl
in the Land of the Pharaohs. Side by side with the new Native Courts, with their model
codes, elaborate procedures and judges who mimicked, even when they didn’t possess,
the character of civilized European magistrates, there was another set of tribunals, far
more powerful and important which dealt with crime in the manner worthy of the Dark
Ages.” Lord Cromer and his predecessors, in response, attempted to make a rupture
with the pre-colonial past and to distance their policies from it by inculcating a “rule of
law” based on impersonal regulations and disciplinary government. Cromer claimed to
abolish the whip, corvee work and corruption, which he saw as the most notorious
vestiges of pre-colonial rule. In 1883, a new penal code was enacted by Cromer on the
Napoleonic model followed in 1884 by promulgating the National Courts or al-Mahakim
al-Ahliyah.

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19 - The modernist narrative of humanization of punishment was harshly deconstructed by the Foucauldian
scholarship. See: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan
or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment,” in *Social suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and
Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 285-308. In the Egyptian context, the
colonial narrative of abolishing whipping was harshly criticized and deconstructed by postcolonial
historical readings. See for example, Khaled Fahmy, “Justice, Law and Pain in Colonial Egypt,” in
*Standing trial: law and the person in the modern Middle East*, ed. Baudouin Dupret (London; New
20 - For a review on the construction national courts and its demise see: Enid Hill, “The Golden
Anniversary of Egypt’s National Courts,” in *Historians in Cairo: essays in honor of George Scanlon*,
In March 1885, the colonial British authorities managed to dominate the Ministry of Interior after a stern conflict in administration with the Khedival elites. In order to get rid of the Egyptian administration, which was perceived by the British as corrupt and despotic, Cromer mandated overwhelming power to the British police and provincial inspectors who superseded the competences of both Egyptian provincial governors (mudara’; sing. mudir) and the village governors (Umdahs). The purviews of Umdahs, such as registering peasants for conscription, collecting taxes and policing villages, were reduced and they were put under the power of a special correctional court (Mahakim al-Ta’dib) to regulate their work and investigate any allegations of their misuse of power.

In addition, Colonel Herbert Kitchener, a British officer posted with the Egyptian army, was appointed Inspector-General of the Egyptian police. He implemented modern reforms according to his experience in India. The high expense of hiring foreign police and legal experts led the British authorities to change its strategy from relying heavily on British soldiers to recruiting natives as watchmen (ghuffara; sing. ghafir) in each quarter and neighborhood in 1890. The Egyptians were trained and armed with the aim at setting a continuous inspection and monitoring of the village life and the intrusion of colonial state to the everyday lives of the inhabitants.

Reforms relapsed

The colonial archives strongly suggest that police reforms in the countryside managed to control crime and maintain private property in rural areas. For example, Sir

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John Scott, the Adviser of the Ministry of Justice, claimed that “there is now not a single band of brigands left in the country, and there are fewer crimes of violence in Egypt than there are in France in proportion to the population.”\(^{24}\) The British contrasted their effective and civilized modern rule of law with the brutal pre-colonial Khedival administration, which was based on arbitrary and despotic measures. However, the pre-colonial “power of exception” persisted in many forms in the modern era. They halted any active intervention to stop the commissions of brigandage for almost five years (1884-1889). On the contrary, they endorsed their operation partially to pick their outcome and to resolve the problem of insecurity and violence in the countryside. As Samera Esmeir argues, they “subcontracted” the trial of bandits to Egyptian authorities and released the responsibility of brutal and inhumane measures from their side.\(^ {25}\) More crucially, the commissions followed exceptional martial tribunals held by the British to convict the leaders and members of the Urabi Revolt. They used the right to exile outside the country all the figures proved to participate in the battles against the British army.

In contrast to the colonial claims, the models of legal modernization and police reforms were always disrupted when applied to peasants’ lives. There were various obstacles that rendered law enforcement, investigations techniques and village surveillance unrewarding and incompetent. On the one hand, brigandage became a tool in the hands of *umdahs* to restore their power and status. When Mr. Mitchell, the British Police inspector in Bani Swayf Province, dismissed the *umdah* from his position, the latter incited brigands to undermine village security to the point that three felonies took

place in a single night. The province inspector had no other choice to reinstate the *umdahto* his former post.\textsuperscript{26} On the other hand, the police in many cases were unable to convince villagers to collaborate with them or to testify against notorious criminals in courts. The “conspiracy of silence,”\textsuperscript{27} as James Scott names it, was a bulwark to find substantial evidence against famous criminals and suspects who participate in cattle lifting and cotton stealing.

The provincial police, therefore, were forced to hire and collaborate with brigands instead of arresting them. William Balls, the British botanist who specialized in cotton technology in Egypt, noticed during his trip in cotton estates that “the same wise policy was followed as by the American police with their turbulent Irishmen; when a brigand become particularly notorious, he was rounded up, and ultimately given a post as ghaffir, practically a police man, whereupon, clothed with authority, zeal, and extensive and peculiar knowledge of criminal ways, he became a terror to evil-doers.”\textsuperscript{28}

\section*{2- Capitalism and its discontents}

Marx was concerned with refuting the liberal and classic economist schools which argued that capitalism is a natural way of organizing human relationships. He argued instead that a precondition for establishing a capitalist mode of production was the


\textsuperscript{28} - Lawrence Balls was a British botanist who specialized in cotton technology and an expert in the Khedivial Agricultural Society of Egypt since 1904. see: William Lawrence Balls, *Egypt of the Egyptians* (London: Pitman; 1915), 117-8.
creation of a dispossessed class that has no alternative except wage labor. The dispossessed couldn’t all be absorbed in agriculture or primitive industry, and many who were dissatisfied with the low wages and the living difficulties turned to theft and brigandage. In this section, I illustrate how the oppressive modernization and the penetration of the capitalist mode of production in the countryside coincided with the criminalization of many social activities that were previously tolerated such as nomadism and vagabondage. I will also sketch out how these boundaries were created and imposed on al-Beheirah Province with the introduction of cotton cultivation and industry and how the category of banditry was situated within this process.

The second half of nineteenth century witnessed harsh penal legislations against vagrancy, begging and petty forms of theft in Egypt. For example, the Khedival government in 1862 arrested 725 workless and unemployed persons, vagabonds from all over Egypt and sent them to a reformatory institution to integrate them in nascent industries. The aim of criminalizing these activities was not only integrating all these alternatives to wage labor, but also to prevent them from turning to banditry.

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30 - They were called urtat al-mudhzibun or the condemned battalion.

31 - The fear of banditry was the impetus to follow this step with legislation forcing the arrest, punishment, and training of vagabonds in 1863 and 1866. The decree of 1866, for example, stated that “it was noted that those without work had become accustomed to a life of laziness, and could potentially turn to
addition, the creation of private property and the circulation of capital operated by another process which is setting a series of decisive legal boundaries and social distinctions between law and crime, citizen and criminal in order to organize the accumulation of capital and protecting the private property.\textsuperscript{32}

**Criminalizing the Bedouins**

Brigandage, which was rampant in al-Beheirah Province, was one of many circles of violence, repression and resistance that inscribed the modern history of the province. Successive governments in nineteenth century Egypt concerned themselves with finding ways to control, mobilize and integrate the Bedouin who lived along state frontiers; Bedouin were considered a permanent and potential threat to public security. The police reports noted that brigandage and habitual outlaws were usually of Bedouin origin.

Russell Pasha, the police inspector in al-Beheirah, classified the bandits in the province as Bedouins and described the security situation in his area as follows: “brigandage in a small way was common throughout the country but every now and then it became a serious affair when a band of some twenty or thirty bad men leagued themselves together and terrorized a whole district.”\textsuperscript{33} Al-Beheirah was home to the largest number of Bedouin and nomads in the entire country; their population in 1906 was 104,000 persons and reached almost 120,000 by 1916.\textsuperscript{34}

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The table shows the census of al-Beheirah population in 1916:\textsuperscript{35}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative divisions</th>
<th>Area in sq. miles</th>
<th>Egyptians</th>
<th>Foreigners</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Population per sq. mile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sedentary</td>
<td>Nomads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beheirah</td>
<td>1,672</td>
<td>665,198</td>
<td>119,404</td>
<td>13,871</td>
<td>798,473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Suspicion was always pointed to nomads who traveled and moved away in the open zones between al-Fayyum and al-Beheirah provinces in the Western Desert. Both the colonial government and the Egyptian elites became aware of the potential danger represented by unsettled nomads. For example ‘Awad Wasif, the journalist and geographer, stated that “as I mentioned that al-Beheirah was battleground in each war; the Bedouins therefore find a bloody pleasure in fighting and hostilities (drinking men’s blood). They found in the province a spacious terrain to fulfill their natural tendencies.”\textsuperscript{36} Accordingly, a British official once suggested in 1912 to incarcerate Bedouins the same way that “America has treated her Red Indians and put [them] in a Reservation, out of which [they] could not emerge without being shot on sight.”\textsuperscript{37}

**Violent modernity**

The al-Beheirah province occupied a central location between the ports of Alexandria, the Nile Delta and western borders. This central location prompted the state to invest in restructuring the province to transform it into a center for trade and industry. The cultivation of cotton, the installation of railroads and the implementation of perennial


\textsuperscript{36} Wasif, 14.

irrigation systems entailed unprecedented levels of state violence or “colonization” as Reinhard Schulze calls it. 38

Banditry was a reaction to oppressive modernization and the forced re-ordering of the countryside. For example, the city of Damanhour, the capital of the province, was leveled when the notable families and residences rejected the installment of railways and resisted extending the railroad to their lands in the mid of nineteenth century. The Khedive Sa‘id bombarded the city with cannon fire to pave a wide trail for trains. The city became a warning example to the other cities and villages that would oppose his modernizing projects. 39 However, violent modernization generated similarly violent response. Many organized gangs were formed and focused on raiding trains and looting cotton cargos. The railroad between Itai al-Baroud and Damnahour, which carried cotton to Alexandria, was commonly raided. For instance, on October 10, 1883, the train that was heading to Alexandria was interrupted by a group of outlaws as it passed by Itai al-Baroud. They robbed it and looted its merchandise. The police suspected a gang of bandits whose raids targeted the industrialized district between Abu Hummus and Kafr al-Dawwar. 40

In addition, al-Beheirah’s geographical significance increased after the reconstruction of the Mahmudiyya Canal which crosses over the province, linking the Nile and Alexandria and contributing to the region’s irrigation system. The digging and excavation of the canal

38 - Schulze defines colonization as “the systematic restriction of regional economy, whereby the ultimate goal is to integrate it into a superimposed division of labor, hierarchized and centralized on the basis of capitalist production.” See: Reinhard C. Schulze, “Colonization and Resistance: The Egyptian Peasant Rebellion in 1919,” in Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East, ed. Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), 172.
lasted from 1807 until 1821 and required over 300,000 corvee laborers, a number that exceeded the population of Cairo at that time. Most of those laborers were brought by force from villages in Upper Egypt and one third of them died under the severe work conditions.

41 Many of the corvee laborers and conscripts fled their work and became involved in highway robberies, cattle lifting, and smuggling. After the end of state monopoly on economy and the abolition of corvee work by the end of nineteenth century, the Delta remained a site for both labor migration and banditry. Newspapers published many complaints and petitions to the police about the danger of Upper Egyptian, Nubian and Sudanese workers.42

**Cotton and brigandage**

Cromer faced two problems when he came to Egypt in 1883: the difficult task of developing the cotton cultivation and industry, and the brigandage that threatened to reverse his efforts. Since the Egyptian economy became completely dependent on the cash crops, Cromer directed all the human and economic resources and geared them to the production of cotton for the British textile industry. But the increase of cotton cultivation and the development of irrigation projects were not possible without the elimination of brigandage that spawned after peasants lost their lands to the royal family and foreign creditors, a problem that worsened following the Urabi Revolution. Cromer

41 - Alan Mikhail defines the new hydraulic system – represented in the Mahmudiyya Canal—as an “imperial system of natural resource management.” He argues that “the very moment Egypt purposefully bypassed the Ottoman system of balancing natural resources documented … was one in which water, labor, the environment, and local control over rural irrigation were taken over as never before by a despotic form of government in the province. Nevertheless, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, at the very moment, according to an Egyptian nationalist narrative, that Egypt gained its independence and modernity, the management of irrigation in Egypt did indeed become despotic.” See: Alan Mikhail, *Nature and empire in Ottoman Egypt: an environmental history* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 35.

realized that security and stability in the countryside was the only guarantee of British control over the financial and economic surpluses in the country.

Therefore, Cromer sought to implement agricultural reforms designed to expand cotton production by distributing small plots of lands to peasants for the purpose of cotton cultivation. Within twenty years (1894-1913), the number of peasants who owned less than five feddans increased threefold.\(^{43}\) Cromer, therefore, claimed always that he was the friend of the “blue-shirted fellahin”\(^{44}\) and a proponent of their prosperity. Likewise, he used to declare that the “reforms” he applied to the police and judiciary had reduced the crime rate. The demise of brigandage was followed by a financial boom in 1897 and lasted until the early years of the twentieth century. This led a British writer to comment that “the best work done by the British in those lower ranks of administration was combating pests like the cattle plague, the cotton worm and brigandage.”\(^{45}\)

However, a financial crisis followed that boom in 1907 and the cotton harvest dwindled in 1909, refuting the colonial claims and pointing to a structural deficit of Egypt’s national cotton-based economy, especially in the Delta region.\(^{46}\) The expansion of cotton cultivation and production proved to be economically and technologically infeasible. In addition to emphasizing the marginalization of the Egyptian economy, cotton production did not promote the development of Egypt’s productive forces. The financial crisis exposed, as well, the usurious character of foreign capital in Egypt which dominated the majority of the cotton plantations.

\(^{43}\) - In 1914, 2,397,000 feddans, i.e., 44 per cent of the entire area of the privately. Owned land, belonged to 12,500 landlords, while only 1,954,000 feddans or 35.8 per cent fell to the share of 1,491,000 peasants (who owned up to ten feddans). See: Vladimir Borisovich Lutsky, Modern history of the Arab countries, trans. Lika Nasser (Moscow, Progress Publishers 1969).

\(^{44}\) - John Marlowe, Cromer in Egypt (New York, Praeger, 1971), 272.

\(^{45}\) - George Young, Egypt from the Napoleonic Wars Down to Cromer and Allenby (NJ: Giorgias Press, 2002), 168.

Al-Beheirah province, for example, suffered heavily from debts. The gross debt reached 3 million LE in 1901, which meant that every agricultural feddan was indebted with 7.5 LE and each inhabitant was indebted with 6 LE. Such circumstances attracted a wide crowd of foreign merchants, moneylenders and stock brokers. Although the foreign population in Al-Beheirah didn’t exceed 1300 in 1906, this population accumulated a huge influence and built a network of interests that penetrated most of the villages and districts. They were protected by the Mixed Courts and managed to seize many cotton plantations through foreclosures and unpaid debts.47

Other indebted peasants lost their land to larger companies. Land companies founded a lucrative business in land reclamation, mortgage and foreclosure.48 They purchased vast lands from Bedouin tribes in very cheap prices for reclamation and selling the land after reclamation with high prices. In 1913, the geographer J. C. Ewald Falls described how land companies accumulated wealth:

Where twenty years ago the Auladali Bedouins lay in wait for the traveller, white snowfields of cotton-trees and palm-shaded villages are now to be seen… Such and such a Beduin tribe can perhaps prove certain ancient rights, and is then compensated with money. Until then the land had no value… The company itself cultivates half of it; cotton, rice, durrha (corn) are planted and attended to by fellahs, who obtain cattle and implements and a fifth of the harvest by way of wages. The owner, supposing that he is no poor speculator, is a millionaire pasha in ten years, but the fellahs toil and moil as before for their Bey or their “compania,” and the Bedouins see with astonishment what is lured forth out of the land.49

The process of parceling out the peasants’ land rapidly gained momentum in the following years. In 1910, foreigners owned 13 per cent of all privately owned lands.

47 - Taqrir ‘an al-Maliyya wa al-Idarah wa al-Hala al-‘Mumiyya Fi Masr wa al-Soudan Sanat 1906, Cairo, Idaret al_Muqattam, 1907. See also, Yousef Nahhas, Al-Fallah: halatuha al-iqtisadiyya wa al-ijtima’iyya (Cairo, Matba’at al-Muqtataf wa al-Muqattam, 1926).

48 - For instance, the al-Beheirah irrigation company (La Société Anonyme Irrigation dans le Behera) was established in 1881 and initiated many projects in digging canals, irrigation and distribution of water. See Ali Baraka, Tatawwur al-Milikiyyah al-Zira’iyyah fi Masr wa ATharuh ‘ala al-harakah al-Siyasiyyah 1813-1914 (Cairo, Dar al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah, 1977), 116.

(700,000 feddans) in Egypt. In accordance with financial crisis and the disruption of cotton economy, banditry re-emerged and the number of offences soared in the years followed 1907. The police reforms and the system of village watchmen (ghuffara) that was inaugurated earlier by the British were not efficacious as well.

In al-Beheirah, many bandits were already incorporated in the capitalist relationship; the land companies and foreign corps hired bandits, especially Bedouins, as watchmen and guards for their business. Russell Pasha admitted the inefficiency of the ghaffir system and wryly commented that hiring brigandage became a sort of wealth insurance for landlords. For example, when Russell arrested al-Matarawi, the notorious bandit of al-Beheirah, he found out that the European Land companies in the province recorded in their budgets several hundred pounds as subscription to the “Matarawi racket.”

3- The Nation and its discontents

Following my main argument about how crime contributed to the construction of law, police, capitalist economy, I will investigate how modern theories of criminology were introduced to Egypt in order to overcome the problem of bandits, recidivists and habitual offenders. The application of phrenological methods of identification and investigation was racialized by colonial police officials and politicized by nationalist elites to claim a distinct national identity. Moreover, I analyze how the developments in criminology proposed repressive and protective measures to separate “citizens” from “the notorious criminals” and to sanitize “civilized society” from habitual offenders who were represented as naturally criminals. The enactment of the police supervision law in Egypt

50 - Lutsky, ibid.
51 - Russell, 84.
in 1909 gave the police the overwhelming power to exile bandits and criminal suspects to the western desert. Exiling bandits to the desert created an “other” called the “outlaw” who opposed citizens and the inhabitants of villages and cities.

**Banditry and Criminology**

Egypt was a “colonial laboratory” for European criminologists, anthropologists and police experts who practiced and experimented with social sciences and modern technologies after the British took over the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice in 1894. These British experts studied the culture, manners and traditions of modern Egyptians in order to dominate them and to test their theoretical and scientific suppositions, including pseudo-scientific theories related to racial differences and hierarchies between the western colonizers and native colonized. For instance, Francis Galton, the British geographer, anthropologist and biologist developed his theories on eugenics, anthropometry, phrenology and penal reform while in Egypt and India. He was summoned to Egypt in 1897 to assist colonel Harvey Pasha, the police commandant of Egypt, in inaugurating new methods of investigation and identification (such as identity cards and fingerprint zincographs) in order to control the mobility of inhabitants, track habitual criminals and facilitate the registration of lands, transfer of property and resolution the conflicting evidences in courts.

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52 - Omnia El Shakry tackled the idea of colonial laboratories in her book *The Great Social Laboratory*. The metaphor of society as a “great social laboratory” in the book title refers to the way of understanding society as a theater for observation, experiment, examination and application of power positivist sciences in reality. The term “laboratory” was used by Gyan Parkash, the Indian postcolonial theorist, who argues that the colonies were laboratories for modernity where universal scientific theories could be formulated and general laws deduced on human inter-relationships. In other words, modernity made the subjects of power and knowledge inseparable. See: Prakash, Gyan. *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. And, Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).
Galton adds that “lastly, the administration of prisons in Egypt being still subject to Government irregularities, it has happened that a prisoner sentenced to a long term has actually been set free instead of another man who bore the same name and was sentenced to a short term and the latter has regained his rights solely owing to the intervention of the Identification Office. Galton adds that “lastly, the administration of prisons in Egypt being still subject to Government irregularities, it has happened that a prisoner sentenced to a long term has actually been set free instead of another man who bore the same name and was sentenced to a short term and the latter has regained his rights solely owing to the intervention of the Identification Office.53

Galton was concerned with studying habitual offenders and recidivists by investigating the natural and social background of criminality. To this end, he introduced new methods of archiving, classification and registration of criminals that enabled police to detect information about recidivists and track their criminal antecedents. Habitual offenders were identified by printing their fingers with ink in order to separate them from civilians, in much the same way that infected persons were quarantined during plagues.54 Police offices started to collect the names of “foreigners,” meaning Upper Egyptians and Bedouins, in each village. They then made lists of suspects’ names and verified their residences and jobs in order to observe them. The Egyptian police also adopted the identity card method, designed by Galton, to track suspects.55 Each card included the convict’s personal information, fingerprints, antecedents and anthropometric measurements. Vagabonds were the first social group required to carry identity cards, and

54 - Ibid.
this new method of policing forced them to reside in permanent addresses and to present themselves regularly at local police stations in order to receive security clearance.56

Figure (2): Identification ticket, 1899.57

Figure (3): Identification ticket for a Sudanese convict, 1890. 58

Crime, phrenology and national identity

57 - Source: National Archives of Egypt, Cairo.
58 - Source: Source: National Archives of Egypt, Cairo. The tickets were issued and stamped in the department of secret police.
Politics and race framed the application of modern modes of investigation and identification, leading these methodologies to contribute to the definition and imagination of Egyptian identity. It contributed to the definition and imagination of Egyptian identity. At the turn of the nineteenth century, many nationalists were concerned with proving that modern Egyptians were genetically and racially connected to their ancient predecessors who built the great Pharaonic civilization. As a result of these concerns, nationalist discourse often excluded Bedouin, Nubian, and Sudanese residents of Egypt from the Egyptian ‘imagined community.’ Simultaneously, positivist criminology, inspired by Cesare Lombroso, argued that crime had connection to race. Lombroso argued, for example, that crime rates were high in the south of Italy because of biological and racial reasons. According to him, the south was backward and degenerated and the southerner recidivists were “born criminals” because they were racially mixed with “nonwhite” races. Racial hybridity, therefore, became a framework to define and track criminals. Lombroso’s ideas greatly influenced the development of colonial criminology in Egypt, and therefore racial hybridity soon became a framework to define and track criminals. Russell Pasha, for example, claims in his memoirs that nearly always the head of brigand descends from outsider origin “half-bred Sudanese” or muwallad. He states that

59 - For example, in 1905 Charles S. Myers applied anthropometric analyses on modern Egyptians and measured the skulls of ancient Egyptians and compared them to data collected from contemporaneous Egyptian soldiers and fellahin. He attempted to prove that modern Egyptians share their ancestors’ characters. See: Charles S. Myers, “Contributions to Egyptian Anthropometry. II--The Comparative Anthropometry of the Most Ancient and Modern Inhabitants,” The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 35, (1905), pp. 80-91.

60 - For more explanation to the relation between modern Egyptian identity and race, see: Troutt Powell, “Brothers along the Nile: Egyptian concepts of race and ethnicity 1895-1910,” in The Nile: histories, cultures, myths, ed. Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni (Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner, 2000), 171-82.

“50 per cent of black blood just giving the extra bit of ruthless courage that made the Sudanese-fellah such dangerous hybrid.”62

**Law of police supervision and exiling bandits**

While the new methods of surveillance and investigation that the British implemented were immediately successful in reducing the crime rate in late nineteenth century Egypt, a new and tumultuous chapter in the story of Egyptian banditry began after the financial crisis of 1907, the story of bandits in Egypt witnessed a tumulus chapter after the financial crisis. The police reports recorded a dramatic turn of murders and misdemeanors in the countryside after the events of 1907. The report of the judicial chancellor of the Egyptian government in 1909 monitored a rise in murders and felonies between 1907 and 1909.63

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>Felonies</th>
<th>Murders and murder attempts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>3288</td>
<td>1214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>3655</td>
<td>1464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>3828</td>
<td>1558</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, the new penal code that was promulgated in 1904 redefined categories of crime and extended the domain of punishment. However, many suspects were not convicted for lack of evidence. Moreover, most villagers were not keen to collaborate with the police or the judiciary in witnessing against dangerous offenders because they feared the revenge of the outlaws or their adherents. Sir Eldon Gorst, the British Consul-

62 - Russell, 79.

63 - *Al-Mu`ayyad*, April 11, 1910, 1.
General in Egypt and the previous Councilor of the Ministry of Interior, affirmed the same conclusion in his annual reports, stating that more than half of the perpetrators of serious crimes were going unpunished because the lack of sufficient evidence. He referred to the lack of coordination between the public prosecution and the police, which caused a high number of acquittals for criminals.64

Although in many cases the village inhabitants knew who was responsible for perpetrating the crime, the lack of villager testimony brought the police and the judiciary to a halt. In addition, many crimes were committed by anonymous criminals. For instance, Nahid Salim, a famous outlaw in the city of Banha, used to hang warrants on trees for the land owners and wealthy persons mentioning that “the red Jin and the black Jin want to obtain a certain amount from the land owner, and if he refused to pay in 24 hours, they are going to murder him treacherously.”65

The rise in murders indicated a revival of banditry and gangs of habitual offenders who became a main concern for both police inspectors and criminologists. The specter of brigandage commissions surfaced once again when the government had recourse to exceptional policies and proposed a law for the detention, confinement and banishment of habitual criminals and brigands. The Egyptian government initiated the law of “Police

64 - Tollefson, 141.

65 - Al-Mu’ayyad, Septembre 1, 1909, 2.
These types of crimes are prevalent in pre-industrial and recently industrialized societies. For example, they represented a remarkable phenomenon common in 18th century England. E P Thompson categorizes them as “crimes of anonymity” which pursued private grievance. They were usually committed by smugglers, poachers, wreckers, and rioters as an instrument of extortion. Thompson argues that crimes of anonymity invoked a tradition of resistance and solidarity against authority and law and private property when forms of collective organized resistance are weak. He states “anonymity was of the essence of any early form of industrial or social protest, because to refuse denomination was to reject the norms of social estates.” See: E P Thompson. “Crime of Anonymity,” in Albion’s fatal tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England, ed. Douglas Hay, (New York : Pantheon Books, 1975), 255-308.
Supervision and Administrational Banishment” came to procession in April 1909. The law established exceptional commissions that had the power to sentence suspect criminals up to five years in a compulsory residence under the police supervision or banishing him outside village community.66

These exceptional laws represented the return of the influence of European and Egyptian aristocracy whose power had dwindled after police reforms. These elite groups exerted enormous pressure on the Ministry of Interior and raised several petitions, security reports and legal notes to the legislative council (Maglis Shura al-Qawanin) and the administrative assembly (al-Jam’iya al-Tashriyya) asking them to enact the law. Gorst refused the law proposal since it brought back exceptional legalities to the country. He thought that doing away with normal judicial and legal procedures would exacerbate the situation rather than solving it because local notables might make use of it to get rid of their opponents. However, Gorst’s efforts to stop the law failed after a mission of aristocrats went to London with the law proposal to convince the British cabinet.67

Given that the evidence was not always available for the police and the parquet to prosecute the perpetrators of crime, the law of police supervision replaced substantial evidence with circumstantial ones such as the prior criminal records of the suspect, the suspect’s reputation, and the testimony of notables and respected figures in each province. For instance, the police arrested a suspect called Ibrahim Younes who was a falafel seller in the city of Itai al-Baroud city in al-Beheirah Province in September 1909. The commission accused him of kidnapping children and asking their families for ransom (halawa). Despite his denial of these charges and the lack of evidence, the court checked

66 - Tollefson, 145.
67 - Ibid.
his criminal record, which indicated that he was previously convicted for seven years of hard labor. The verdict was clinched with the testimony of city notables affirming the suspect’s bad reputation. Based on reputation, the testimony of notables and his previous criminal record, Younes was condemned and sentenced for five years of confinement in his Itai al-Baroud under police surveillance and ordered to pay a 300 LE fine.68

If a brigand violated the confinement or police supervision, the provincial authorities were mandated to send to him a penal colony in al-Kharjah Oasis in the Western Desert. Commissions in each province started to list dangerous criminals, habitual offenders and suspected brigands. Indeed, these commissions filed more than 12000 names of the most dangerous, but the Ministry of Interior filtered them later to 1200.69 281 suspects had been convicted of crimes or prosecuted for serious crimes and sent to the penal colony in 1909, and this was followed by other sessions of commissions between 1910 and 1912. By 1912, the colony had about 500 prisoners.

Criminology and protecting the civilized society

The judicial counselor justified the exceptional competence of the law by referring to a number of legal precedents. Firstly was the Italian criminal law of 188970 which came to deal with the problems of juvenile delinquency, professional criminals and habitual offenders. The second reference was the 1898 code of criminal procedure in India. The law and its precedents, in Italy as well as in India, were influenced robustly by the shift in positivist criminology and criminal anthropology in late nineteenth century.

69 - The Ministry of Interior reduced them later to 283, 236 of them had been convicted of crimes or prosecuted for serious crimes, See: Tollefson, Ibid.
70 - The law was known as Zanardelli code named after the Italian juris-consult Giuseppe Zanardelli (1826 –1903). He was assigned as minister of justice, minister of interior and later the Prime minister.
Positivist criminologists argued that recidivism and habitual delinquency represent relapse from human nature and social norms. Habitual criminals, therefore, have to be separated from the occasional offenders to sterilize their destructive effect on society. They refused the classical penal policies which depended on incarceration and the penitentiary, for they proved to be ineffective in eliminating crime or reducing the number of offenders. Prisons, according to this new discursive logic, became “training schools for crime”71 and a shelter for many criminals where they could find food and comfortable seclusion.

Consequently, they shifted their attention from the criminal’s immutability to protecting the society from “criminal classes”72 and professional offenders or those who were diagnosed by Lombroso as “prone to crime.”73 Penal codes, accordingly, altered from punitive measures to be more preventive and protective such as custodial safety, solitary confinement, compulsory residence, police supervision and hard labor in penal colonies. The law of police supervision in Egypt was a perfect case for politicizing criminology and deploying it in the construction of the national identity by creating and exterior “outlaw” who represents the evil other in opposition to good criminals. The law decree reiterated the trope of emergency and saving the national interest; the judicial chancellor’s report affirmed that “if the nationals interest was threaten by any of its fragments, then there is a necessity to impose a temporary and limited restraint on the

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   See also, General Report by Dr. Crookshank on the Changes Introduced in the Management of Egyptian Prisons since January 1, 1884. (FO 633/53).
73 - Cesare Lombroso, Crime, its causes and remedies (Boston, Little, Brown and company, 1918), 64.
liberties of this fragment.” 74 The exceptional legislations, therefore, were essential for the realizing the nation’s common interest and to protect the “good section” of citizens from a minority of “antisocial” 75 individuals who transgress the norms and laws of the society.

74- Al-Mu’ayyad, Septembre 1, 1909, 1.
75 - Ibid.
Chapter Two: The Controversy of Adham al-Sharqawi

Class Struggle, Family History and Crime

Following the historical background and political landscape addressed in the last chapter, I attempt in this chapter to unpack the story of Egypt’s most famous “heroic criminal” as was developed hand in hand with the formation of the nation-state. Adham was born in 1898 in Zubaidah, a village located in the Itai al Baroud constituency in the governorate of al-Behairah, in the West of the Nile Delta. Due to its inopportune geographic location, the province suffered greatly from a shortage of water supply and fertile soil. As a result, the province was divided into vast land estates (‘izab; sing. ‘izba) dominated by aristocratic families who translated their status into political influence by occupying the exclusive provincial positions such as that of al-‘umda (village mayors). Additionally, the national demographic policies transferred many of the Bedouins and frontier groups into the province; they were recruited in special police troops in order to suppress any potential uprisings and to maintain the control of dispossessed peasants who had gradually lost their lands due to the economic transformations linked to free trade with Europe.76

The history of the al-Sharqawi family revolves around numerous conflicts over land and local power and consists of series of migrations. They used to live in the al-Sharqiyah province on the east side of the Nile Delta, but after heated competitions over land property with aristocratic families, they were forced to migrate and settle in Itai al-Baroud in al-Beheirah province. By the early years of the twentieth century, they joined the rural middle class, owning almost 800 Feddans and dominating small villages such as

Zebeidah where Adham was born. 77 The repeated upheavals and the feeling of occupying a lower social status compared to aristocratic families led Mahmoud al Sharqawi, Adham’s uncle, to challenge the provincial authorities and the aristocratic families who, as a result, considered him a dangerous outlaw.

Notably, Mahmoud was involved in a dispute with Mohammed Sa’id Pasha, the governor of al-Beheirah, when he married Mohammed’s cousin against his will.

Mohammed Sa’id, who originally descended from Turkish origins, eventually became the Minister of Interior in 1911.79 Simultaneously, the countryside was undergoing a severe increase in crime coupled with inefficient government’s policies to deal with that

78 - P.R.O., F.O 3711/ 1110, September 4, 1911. See also, Al-Musawwar, 1972.
79 - Mohammad S’aid Pasha (1863-1928) was Egypt’s Prime Minister (February 1910- April 1914; May 1919- November 1919), the Minister of Interior (1911) and the father of the famous artist Mahmoud Sa’id. He was born in Alexandria to a family of Turkish origin; he was educated at the Khedival Law School. He married the niece of Ahmad Mazlum Pasha (the Minister of Agriculture and Awqaf and a relative of the Royal family). Sa’id rose up though the parquet of the Mixed Courts and the judiciary, becoming Interior Minister under Botrus Ghali between 1908 and 1910, then succeeding him as a premier upon the latter’s assassination. See: Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr, Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 178-9.
pervasive instability. The demands from landlords to strengthen the power of the police and to eliminate the problem of bandits became increasingly urgent. As a result, Sa’id devoted special attention to modernizing the police system by militarizing the watchmen (ghuffara), or rural guard system, and by selecting members of influential families for the position of ‘Umda or the villages’ mayors. As previously illustrated, the problem of brigandage had become a national concern since the late nineteenth century, and the Khedival government had assigned the law of *Qumusyunat al-ashqiaya*’ or The Commissions of Brigands to eliminate the problem, where punishments were raised to include the execution of the heads of the brigands. When the same ‘problem’ reemerged in 1908, the government decided to apply the law of *al-Nafi al-Idari*, or administrative banishment. The law entailed exiling notorious criminals and outlaws from their provinces to the Western Oasis of al-Kharja for a couple of years.80

![Figure (5): letter by Mahmoud al-Sharqawi from his exile in al-Kharja Oasis](image)

81 - Ibid.
Sa’id thus decided to seek revenge on his rival by exiling him as a dangerous brigand. On 23 May 1910, the “Commission of Administrative Banishment” gathered under the presidency of Ahmad Kamal pasha, the governor of al-Beheirah, and discussed the case of Mahmoud Effendi Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi, the 35-year-old notable of Zebeidah. Mahmoud was accused of committing 34 crimes, eighteen of which were felonies and misdemeanors, including murder, poisoning cattle and theft. The correspondent of *al-Mu’aiyad* newspaper mocked the notable criminal and commented that “we thought that those who (were) convicted of administrative banishment for committing dangerous crimes were only outlaws and murderers who lacked socialization and lacked education. We never thought that they might include a wealthy man who would professionalize in crime not for earning for life but for fame and power.”

Mahmoud al-Sharqawi (the uncle) stood before the Itai al-Baroud court house. According to the legal proceedings, the court summoned twenty-nine advocates and thirty-one witnesses of condemnation, most of whom were village mayors (‘Umad) and notables (A‘yan). Al-Sheikh Ali Radi, the mayor of Kenisat al-Daheriyah, served as a witness against Mahmoud al-Sharqawi, stating that “he is the most dangerous bandit [shaqi] in the Province of al-Beheirah. He exceeded any limit in criminality, since he tried to poison his father Ali effendi Abdel-Rahman al-Sharqawi.”

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82 - *Al-Mu’aiyad* newspaper was founded by Mustafa Kamel, the leader of nationalist and anti-colonial movement in Egypt in early twentieth century. Despite its nationalist tendencies, it represented the effendiya’s point of view in many cases.

83 - The police report described Mahmoud al-Sharqawi as “Owing to his wealth, family and powerful position and to terror which his name inspires … it was felt that, …, if any, witnesses would dare to come forward against him.” In the same report, Dudley Russell (Russell Pasha later), the British inspector in Behera at the time stated that “the type of wealthy criminals that no Egyptian believed could be touched.”

newspaper stated that Mahmoud “was involved in brigandage for 15 years until he dominated the entire district of Itai al-Baroud and Koum Hamadah.” 85

It is noteworthy that most of the witnesses for the defense were village mayors, competitor notables and police officers. For instance, Mahmoud Bek Rahsad, the ma’mour or the police administrator of Itai al-Baroud, testified that “Mahmoud was a head of two gangs in al-Beheirah and al-Gharbeiah, and that his brother told him that Mahmoud attempted to force his father to sign a land contract to leave six feddans to him using a pistol.” He added that “Mahmoud cooperates with his brother Abdel Aziz in brigandage.” 86

Abdel Majid al-Sharqawi, Mahmoud’s brother, sent a petition to the head of the United Kingdom’s House of Commons complaining about the unfair charges. He mentioned that the court had sued his brother over a personal rivalry between his brother and Mohammed Sa’id Pasha, the Prime Minister. He also mentioned that “Sa’id’s cousin loved Mahmoud al-Sharqawi and hired him as her legal deputy to confront her cousin’s greed.” Mahmoud restored the lady’s estate from the pasha and bought it from her later. When Sa’id Pasha failed to take the land back, he threatened al-Sharqawi and used the administrative banishment as a cover to get rid of his enemy. 87

Mahmoud’s brother was well aware of the negative reception of the banishment laws in Britain and the overall suspicion by the British authorities in Egypt regarding the efficiency of the law. He therefore repeatedly praised “British justice” in the petition. He began his complaint by stating, “I raise this petition that proves clearly that the Egyptian official’s lack of responsibility, whatever his integrity or his honesty was. … that what

86 - Ibid.
87 - P.R.O., F.O., 371/893.
happened in [the] Egypt, especially in al-Beheirah, resembles the severe injustice that negates [the] British justice completely … your occupation was hospitably received by the rational men who are considering the public good (interest) of the country.”

He, therefore, suggested the intervention of the British authorities to restore law and order and to stop the “despotism of pashas and the Egyptian rulers”. He further stated that “the condition went well during the reign of the Lord Cromer, [to] whom the Egyptians remember with all the best memory and gratitude …. This great reformer who uttered with wisdom once that: the highest Egyptian official employee has to submit to the smallest British employer.”

The petition also shows Abdel Majid’s political ambitions; since his career as ‘umda was being restricted by the Turkish aristocratic families that were also targeting his brother, and that his social ambitions were going to reach an impasse without external support.

Figure (6): part of Abdel Majid’s petition

88 - Ibid.
89 - Ibid.
90 - Ibid.
The Imprisonment of Adham:

The press coverage from the time refers to a rift inside the al-Sahrqawi family, between Mahmoud and some of his brothers. The conflict was turning to land ownership as well since Mahmoud tried to force his father to transfer land to him. The family divisions surfaced in court when Mahmoud’s father tried to clear the name of his son and denied any murder attempt committed by him, but Mahmoud’s uncle and one brother testified against him. 91 The petition of Abdel Majid al-Sharqawi, in addition, reveals that he was looking beyond saving his brother or even his family interests; he had a personal ambition to achieve the status of Bek and launch a political career.

After being sentenced to exile in the al-Khajah Oasis, Mahmoud al-Sharqawi married one of his house maids and took her with him. They returned from exile after seven years with their two children. Mahmoud tried to restore his reputation and to revenge the people who had testified against him but was soon shot and killed by an outlaw hired by one of the family’s rivals. The Ballad of Adham al-Sharqawi considers the murder of his uncle as a turning point in Adham’s life, since he left school immediately after and started tracing the culprits and their abettors. During this period Adham was involved in some disputes with village guards (ghuffara) and injured one of them, for which he was sentenced to prison.92

The Mawwal (ballad) of Adham al-Sharqawi claims that the al-Sharqawi family divided into two factions after the murder of Mahmoud, and that the situation was further exacerbated when Abdel-Majid al-Sharqawy, Adham’s other uncle, was honored with the status of Bek and became the Umda of the Zubaidah village. Abdel Majid disputed with

91 - Farouq Abdel-Salam, “Man Yamluk Adham,” Akher Sa’ah, February 5, 1964, 42. Also, Farouq Abdel-Salam, “Hal Tantahi Azmat al-Ustourah al-Sha‘abiyyah?,” Akher Sa’ah, February 12, 1964, 34.
his nephew after the former started to seek appeasement and make peace with the rival families.

Adham, who had been extremely close to his uncle Mahmoud, refused the appeasement policies of his other uncle Abdel Majid. Adham was also involved in clashes with some well-off students descended from another village and was expelled from school when he was eighteen. The ballad describes the correlations between Mahmoud’s murder and Adham’s expulsion from school, noting that:

The boy was at school from the age of thirteen  
And he was still at school when he reached eighteen  
He lived carefree until he received the news that his uncle had been killed …  
He told them, “My uncle died, my friends, and what am I to do in this village?”  
And he went and said in town, “Make way for me or direct me to the enemy’s home.”  
He headed for the enemy’s son and ripped him open with his [bare] hands  
And he killed three of those who were sitting around him  
The government came and said, “I'Adham, why did you do that?”  
He told them, “Government, when my uncle was killed, what did you do?”

The ballad states that Adham was imprisoned when he tried to take revenge for his uncle’s murder. However, the real reasons behind Adham’s first imprisonment are still unclear thanks to the contradictory stories that chronicle the incident. On the one hand, some narratives affirm that Abdel Majid witnessed against Adham in the court to clear his own position. The predecessors of Al-Sharqawi’s family, on the other hand, tried to deny any collusion between Adham and his uncle. They attribute the first

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imprisonment of Adham to an argument between him and the guard regarding a female peasant or *fellaha* who adored Adham. 94

While Adham was in prison, he met, by coincidence, an outlaw who claimed to have shot his uncle. Adham killed the outlaw and was sentenced to death, but the punishment was eventually reduced to a life labor sentence. Adham was sent to Liman Turah, one of the most severe Egyptian prisons, in 1917. 95 The ballad presents the way Adham took his revenge in a dramatic way. 96

**Escaping from Liman Turah:**

Adham’s fate intersected with the fate of his country. During the heyday of the March 1919 nationalist revolt against the British occupation of Egypt, demonstrators stormed the prison of Liman Turah where the most dangerous criminals were incarcerated. The demonstrators’ slogans of independence, justice and liberty echoed in a chaotic scene, where a diverse spectrum of people took the risk of breaking the curfew imposed by colonial authorities by marching en masse toward the headquarters of the authorities. It is notable that the protests headed to the prison and that the slogans of independence found a lively response from convicts who started to disobey the guards’ orders and to attack officers and soldiers inside the prison.

When the slogans of political independence and the liberation of Egypt met the desire for freedom and the rebellious potential of the prisoners, the walls of Liman Turah prison collapsed and the flock of convicts fled from the prison to the outside world. It

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94 - Other narratives claim that Adham was imprisoned after killing a blind vagabond when the latter tried to seduce him. However, I am still suspicious about the veracity of this record-. See: Hamdi Radi, *Dirasat fi al-Folklore*, 8.
96 - While he was in the prison he took revenge upon the murderer who had killed one of his closest relatives (another uncle), so he was sentenced to “hard labor for life”.

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was within this most revealing moment, which encompassed crime, resistance, chaos, and nationalism, that the dramatic story of Adham al Sharqawi truly began to unfold.

The prisoner escape from Liman Turah was recorded in the memoirs of ‘Erian Youssef Saad, a political prisoner who was convicted of attempting to assassinate Youssef Pasha Wahba, the Egyptian Prime Minister, in 1919. 97 ‘Erian describes how prisoners yearned for a public pardon by the Sultan; he gives many examples of daily conversations between prisoners which centered around the possibility of being released under any conditions. His prison memoirs record a “special oral history” exchanged between prisoners, as he describes their ambitions for freedom and their reactions during the outbreak of the 1919 Revolution. He states that

“when Saad Zaghloul was arrested- by the British - the wind of revolution stormed the country. The prisoners who have political opinions were talking about the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution. They argue that every revolution has to resemble the same path … convicts sleep every night with the hope that the next day’s sun will rise over empty prisons. They wake up every day with the belief that the sun will never set on them inside the prison.” 98

The prisoners were not detached from political developments, especially during the WWI years; they followed political news and the rumors that circulated daily.

‘Erian’s memoir continues adding that “the news sprung from the ground and fell from the sky. They were just rumors, but they were like rains pouring making the hope of freedom grow and blossom.” 99

97 - ‘Erian Youssef Saad, the medical student who tried to assassinate Youssef Wahba, the Egyptian Prime Minister in 1919. ‘Erian was a member of a radical clandestine organization “al-yadd al-sawda,” or the Black Fist, which was assigned to assassinate Egyptian collaborators and other pro-British figures. ‘Erian was sentenced to death but the verdict was reduced to life labor; he was sent to Liman Turah prison immediately after Adham’s escape. See his memoir: Mudhdhakirat Erian Youssef Saad (Cairo: Dar al Shorouk, 2007).
‘Erian’s account of the prisoners is useful in providing a context for Adham’s life story, as he describes in detail how the prisoners escaped from Liman Turah. The rumors circulated to Turah prisoners were that the residence of the al Khalifah district had freed the prisoners from Kere Midan prison in Cairo, and that the Bedouins of Arab al Basil – who belong to al Wafid (the Egyptian Delegation) took over Cairo’s citadel and liberated it from the British troops.100 ‘Erian explains how the convicts rebelled inside the prison after this dialogue between the al-daidaban, or the prison warden, and one of the prisoners:

The warden: what are you folks waiting for? Are you waiting for the prisoner women in Qara Midan to free you?
The prisoner: will you shoot us if this is the case?”
The warden: I avow that there is no soldier who will shoot an Egyptian, even if he were a prisoner trying to flee.

‘Erian follows: “they (prisoners) knocked on the main gate, and forced the guards or the al-gawish (the sergeant) to open it …. In the spur of the moment, a torrent of prisoners flowed from the prison gates flee through the walls and exits and run everywhere outside.”101 Adham was among the about four hundred prisoners who managed to escape from Liman Turah that day. 102 The ballad of Adham states that he broke through the cage bars with his own hands and fled from the prison during the demonstration.103

The boy was sentenced to solitary confinement
The boy was slim and fit, Glory be to his Creator

100 - Hamda al-Basel, the tribal chief in al-Fayyoumm, was among the Egyptian Delegation that led post-World War I negotiations for independence in Paris Peace Conference.
102 - Hamdi Abdel Radi mentioned in his account that Adham fled from the prison during the street sweepers’ strike. The Ministry of the Interior, according to him, brought some prisoner to replace the sweepers. However, it is hard to endorse that the government left a dangerous criminal with a life sentence in the street. See: Dirasat fi al Folklore, 10.
103 - The scene represented later in Youssef Chahine movie al-Ard “The Land”, when the peasants met students coming from the demonstrations.
He folded himself over and straightened himself out in the cell, so that he broke it down, and he sprang from the prison, so that even the wall didn’t see him.104

**The Controversy over the Murder of Hussein al-Siwi:**

After fleeing from prison, Adham’s life reached a turning point when he accompanied a group of bandits who set out to block the railway and rob a British military train coming from Alexandria. The repeated attacks on British trains were a remarkable feature of rural insurgencies after World War I. The Delta provinces were drastically affected by World War I, especially after the British army pressed thousands of young peasants into hard labor on the battlefields and utilized the whole country to serve its imperial interests. Consequently, the peasant revolt “centered mainly on preventing goods and men from being transported by the rail system.”105

The train robbery established Adham as more than a notorious criminal; he became a patriotic celebrity. Indeed, the operation had been very risky, particularly as the British authorities punished any assault on the railroads by hanging. Adham thus entered popular memory as a courageous man who had robbed weapons and provisions meant to suppress the national resistance.

Adham’s story, hitherto, is reminiscent of the “primitive rebels”106 model developed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm. As discussed in the introduction, Hobsbawm formulated a historical and theoretical framework for the Brigand phenomenon, arguing that although outlaws were individuals living on the edges of rural societies, robbing and plundering, they

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were often perceived by peasants as folk heroes and leaders of popular resistance movements.\footnote{107 - Although Hobsbawn values these forms of resistance, he calls them “primitive” since they do not aim to change the whole class’ relation to society or to change the political system. He, therefore, considers many forms of social banditry, such as the Sicilian mafia, church labor and some anarchic movements, to represent a “pre-historic stage of social agitation.” See: Eric Hobsbawm, \textit{Primitive Rebels}, 10.}

After the train robbery and his ascent to folk figure status in al-Beheirah, Adham returned to his village to retaliate against his uncle and those supporters who had testified against him. Abdel Majid al-Sharqawi was powerful though, so Adham failed to reach him and turned his attention to other notables in the province instead. He became a renowned brigand after he assassinated al-Sheikh Hussein al-Siwi, a famous Bedouin whose family descended from the Bedouins of the Siwa Oasis in the Western Desert. Adham went to al-Siwi’s palace and shot him in the presence of a number of notables and government officers.\footnote{108 - “Taghyat al-Beheirah”, \textit{al-Ahram}, October 4, 1921.} He then looked over to where the witnesses were standing and loudly shouted “Long live Adham” (yahyya \textit{Adham}).\footnote{109 - Galal Hussein, “Sultan al-Ashqia’ wa masra’uh,” \textit{al-Ahram}, October 14, 1921; “Aqebat al-baghi: maqtal shaqi Kabir,” \textit{al-Ahram}, October 13, 1921.}

The incident was only the beginning of Adham’s controversial reign; he soon formed a gang which embarked on a string of similar assassinations and robberies. Moreover, the broad desert frontiers surrounding the province offered his gang safe shelter from the police and a starting point from which to launch their valiant raids. A journalist commented that Adham “nominated himself as ‘the sultan of brigands’ and founded a council of ministers to assist him in taking decisions. He gives death and looting sentences and commits the murders in midday. He never committed a crime in the darkness.”\footnote{110 - “Masar Sahqi Kabir,” \textit{Al-Lata’if al-Musawarah}, October 31, 1921; “Qatl Shaqi Kabir,” \textit{al-Muqattam}, October 31, 1921.} Adham’s time in prison hardened him as an individual and made his tactics...
at seeking revenge particularly brutal. His gang was not only a concern of the Cairo press, but it also quickly became a serious concern for the police administration which assigned a 200 LE reward for any information about Adham.

Whereas Adham’s family considered the murder of Hussein al-Siwi to be a work of heroism and courage, as Adham killed him in defense of the poor peasants, the al-Siwi family narrates the story from a completely different vantage point. The al-Siwi descendants contend that Adham was a paid hit-man hired by the al-Qouni family to kill their grandfather who competed with them and challenged their influence in Itai al-Baroud.

Mohammed Gharib al-Sharqawi, one of Adham’s relatives, argued that “When Adham fled from the prison, he started to levy a certain amount of money on the rich people to give them to the poor.”111 This way of charging did not appeal to many notables, especially to Adham’s uncle Abdel Majid and el-sheikh Hussein al-Siwi who sent petitions to the police complaining about the charges and asked the state to intervene.112 But Adham managed to recruit some watchmen (ghuffara) to tell him when the police were going to raid his hideout. This image of the clever, noble and patriotic bandit emerged in Anwar al-Sadat’s autobiography, which mentions Adham as an example of the pre-1952 revolution rural rebellions. As Sadat commented, “Then came the 1919 revolution, Adham and Badran (his partner) turned into princely robbers a la Robin Hood, as they waged war against both the British occupying forces and Egyptian feudal

111 - Masr Allati la Na’rifuha, Cairo’s Radio, 1996.
landowners. Instead of just stealing for the sake of stealing, they began to take from the rich to give the poor.”

Adel al-Siwi, the grandson of Hussein, narrates the story from a contrasting point of view, affirming that Adham was ordered by the big landlords in the province to get rid of Hussein al-Siwi whose accelerating influence and wealth were threatening them. Adham, from al-Siwi’s perspective, was not a noble bandit who sought the sake of equality and justice; he was a paid outlaw.

Nevertheless, Adel al-Siwi thinks that the phenomenon of Adham is more complicated, that he was more than a tool in a conflict between families. Adel himself confessed that his situation was controversial. On the one hand, he was related to the victim whose murder had a catastrophic influenced on his father. The vast land and wealth accumulated by Hussein al-Siwi was divided between his sons, and the prominent family glory faded away. Yet, on the other hand, Adel still harbors sympathy for the folkloric deeds of the bandits. As an intellectual involved in politics and public debates on cultural heritage, he states, “I can’t help but respect the popular image of a heroic man who took revenge for the sake of justice, although it is not true historically.” He considers the ballad of Adham an expression of popular “wishful thinking” that projects an inability to change contemporary injustices onto a heroic historic model.

The long history of state violence and domination in the countryside created a double image of the nation state or al-hukumah. It became, as Adel argues, a “mythical

114 - Adel al-Siwi, Interview with the author, Cairo, July 5, 2010. Adel as-Siwi, the grandson of al-Sheikh Hussein al-Siwi, is a contemporary renowned artist and painter.
115 - Ibid.
entity” that dominates the lives of Egyptians “like gods in Greek mythology.”\(^{116}\)

However, peasants resisted the state, mocking it in their daily lives, proverbs and folk tales. The fictional or folkloric hero has a two-fold character: Whereas he belongs to the people and represents the other, average citizens who want to avoid any high-cost confrontation with the state’s repressive apparatus, he also takes over the actual resistance. Adel argues that Adham drew popular attention because he raised arms against the state, which was effectively a “mythical entity”. He fulfilled the collective psychological need for a “tragic protagonist” by challenging his predestined fate of subservience.\(^{117}\)

**The families’ conflict, violence and banditry:**

The controversy surrounding the murder of Hussein al-Siwi reveals a history of social transformation and power struggle in modern Egyptian society in general, and in al-Beheirah in particular. The class conflict in Itai al Baroud took place between two types of families: the old aristocratic families who descend from Turkish origins such as the family that Mohammed Sa’id Pasha belonged to, and the new agricultural bourgeois families that settled in the province with the establishment of Mohammed Ali’s state, such as the al-Sharqawi and al-Siwi families. In this section I will explain the types of violence that emerged with the rise of private land ownership in al-Beheirah. Both Adham’s crimes and noble banditry were contextualized within the conflict over political influence, social status and economic accumulation between families. For instance, the al-Siwi narrative refers to the use of bandits to liquidate political rivals; Adel al-Siwi argued that al-Qouni family hired Adham to kill his grandfather.

\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Ibid.
The al-Qouni are an example of the first families descended from Turkish origins, from Konya in Anatolia, that immigrated to Egypt after the wars of Mohammed Ali’s army with the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century. The state endowed vast lands and high social privileges to the Turkish and Circassian Army commanders and officers and based its new administrative policies west of the Delta in cooperation with those new elites who invested in real estate and agriculture and who accumulated their private properties after the British occupation. The al-Qouni translated their provincial power into the establishment of their own ‘izba. The term ‘izba refers to a kind of “agricultural colony” or estate that includes landlords, agricultural supervisors and peasants in one spatial organization. The ‘izba owners were “absolute masters,” not accountable to anyone, and dominating the lives of peasants. Timothy Mitchell states that the proprietor of the ‘izba was “a sovereign,” an “absolute master.” He was accountable to no one. He could imprison, expel, starve, exploit and exercise many other forms of arbitrary, exceptional, and, if necessary, violent powers.” People in Itai al-Baroud still circulate the story of Abu Deqiqah who was tortured by landlords. He was a handsome barber who was involved in an argument with a member of the al-Quniyah family, arrested by their watchmen and sent to their private prison inside the ‘izba. Abu Deqiqah committed suicide by burning himself when the Umda of al-Quniyah asked him to eat his feces in order to earn his release.

118 - Timothy Mitchell argues that the system of ‘izba resembles the power of market economy, private property and modern administrative policies in the countryside. He considers them as examples of “the powers of exception” or the hierarchies or the inequalities which result from applying modern forms of social and economic organization. See: Timothy Mitchell, Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 70-1.
119 - Ibid, 70.
120 - Adel al-Siwi, ibid.
The supremacy of aristocratic families such as al-Qouni was strongly threatened by the rise of an agricultural bourgeoisie represented by the al-Siwi family. The al-Siwi emigrated from the Siwa Oasis in the western Desert to al-Beheirah in mid-nineteenth century. The al-Siwi tribe settled in Itai al-Broud and started to accumulate land which was registered by holding and reforming “wad’a al yad”121. The family forefather, Darwish al-Siwi, Hussein’s grandfather, became a local governor umda of the al-Nubbairah village and built the great mosque of al-Nubbairah “al-Gamie’ al-Kabir.” It is claimed that he hosted the mayor of Athens at his home in al-Saraya when the latter visited the Greek community in al-Behaira, and that the mayor was granted his own stick to put in the house entrance. Hussein al-Siwi was a prominent figure in the second generation of al-Siwi, with wealth and influence known throughout the entire province. He made a career of reforming land and doing commerce in cotton, and he further expanded his influence by serving as mayor of the al-Nubeirah district in Itai al-Baroud.

According to Adel, Hussein al-Siwi was a model rural capitalist or agricultural bourgeoisie. He was a self-made man who accumulated his wealth thanks to his entrepreneurial skills, unlike other aristocratic families whose wealth was only a result of their kinship legacies. He owned 500 feddans, exported and charged cotton to Britain, and planned to establish small railways in his estates to carry the cargo. When al-Siwi’s career was soaring and it seemed that his power was increasing by his gathering of family, money and potential political influence, the other landlords and vast estate owners felt they needed to stop him. Adel states: “he paid the price of the rising of his family and their growing property.”122

121 - Squatting.
122 - Ibid.
As Hussein al-Siwi was ostentatious and known to express his wealth and excesses, the old families decided to shun him. Adel al-Siwi argues that, contrary to the dominant popular belief that Adham was a rebel, he was instead a hired murderer who was paid by notables to kill their rivals. He charges that the al-Qouni family was behind his grandfather’s death, ordered as a means to put a stop to his growing influence. Adel states that “some people say that al-Qouni pashas hired Adham as a hit man to get rid of their competitors.” Adel’s claim is reinforced by some stories told by people from the al-Qouni family which recount that “Adham killed al-Siwi and cut his neck and threw it in the ground and kicked it.” 123

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123 - Adel al-Siwi recounts that when Adham intruded into al-Seiw’s house he was accompanied by another outlaw called Shaldam. When Shaldam refused to shoot al-Siwi, suggesting that a warning of murder was enough, Adham shouted that they were paid for the murder and could not dismiss the agreement. In Adel’s narrative, Adham said: “it is not a child’s game or “mehs li b ‘iyal”.”
Conclusion

The criminal produces an impression, partly moral and partly tragic, as the case may be, and in this way renders a "service" by arousing the moral and aesthetic feelings of the public ... He produces not only compendia on Criminal Law, not only penal codes and along with them legislators in this field, but also art, belles-lettres, novels, and even tragedies ... The criminal breaks the monotony and everyday security of bourgeois life.124

In this chapter I have sketched a concise biography of Adham al-Sharqawi, the most famous bandit in the history of modern Egypt, in order to illuminate the conflicts that contextualized his life and their impact on the resultant controversial interpretations of his character. I focused on the conflict between aristocratic and bourgeoisie families over property and political influence which motivated most of the crimes committed by Adham and his uncle. I also explained the new terms of violence that emerged with the introduction of the market economy and modern forms of power and administration in the countryside. In order to avoid the over-determinism that can accompany economic analysis, I applied a methodology that synthesizes political economy and ethnography. I conducted a careful reading of the controversial narratives about Adham and his rivals and drew on the oral histories and folk tales circulated in the Itai al-Baroud district.

My conclusion, consequently, situates this methodology within a political frame. I will apply my research findings to answer the question I posed in the introduction regarding the relationship between analysis of crime and understanding the rise of nationalism. The conclusion is divided into two parts. First, I will trace how the question of bandits influenced the

establishment of the modern state and disciplinary institutions in Egypt. Second, I will explain how the controversial narratives of Adham help to further our understanding of nationalism.

**Bandits and the Modern State:**

The stories of bandits such as Adham al-Sahrqawi and Abdel Samad al-Siwi reveal an important aspect of class struggle in the countryside. Adham’s story specifically shows the social status occupied by some bandits who were respected by both notables and other bandits. Eric Hobsbawm’s thesis on “social bandits” is useful in this sense as Hobsbawm argues that social bandits are outlaws who live on the edges of rural societies by robbing and plundering, whereas land lords and the state regard them as criminals, they are considered within the peasant society as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation. The emergence of banditry usually follows economic crises especially in the societies that witness industrialization and transform from rural to capitalized forms of production and social organization.

Hobsbawm states that social bandits become major threats to state domination and the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over society. Nathan Brown, correspondingly, argues that the modern state in Egypt elevated the urgency of the crisis of brigands to tighten its monopoly of violence and to suppress this sort of collective action in the countryside. For example, the khedival government (1848-1882) established “the commissions of the outlaws” which heightened punishments for this kind of crime. The state did not only enhance its material sovereignty. It also expanded its symbolic presence by presenting the brigands as a “common threat” affecting all citizens. Fear of crime can thus be considered one of the building blocks of

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125 - Hobsbawm, *Bandits*.
the “imagined community” in Egypt because it motivated citizens to perceive a generalized threat, shared by all.

The story of Adham exemplifies the persistence of the problem of brigands. It exposes the social turmoil in the countryside that translated into widespread rural crimes in the postcolonial order. One of the national security reports affirmed that “after 1919, attacks on members of the police and the state apparatus increased at a conspicuous rate.”¹²⁷ Nathan Brown argues that the concept of crime was transformed from a local village concern to an issue of national importance. Thus, the monitoring, reporting, and adjudication of rural crime were centralized as national and civic duties.¹²⁸

After Hussein al-Siwi was murdered, arresting Adham became a “civic duty.” Hussein Darwish Pasha, the minister of Awqaf and al-Siwi’s brother in law, submitted a petition to the legislative assembly (the parliamentary entity in Egypt before 1923) asking for further investigation and for the arrest of the dangerous bandit who terrorized the al-Beheirah province. The case of Adham escalated from a provincial conflict between families to a national concern, and the Ministry of Police ordered Mohammed ‘Alam pasha, the governor of al-Beheirah, to personally inspect the conditions of order and security in the province. He gathered all the provincial mayors (‘umdas) and notables and encouraged them to cooperate in eliminating crimes, and banditry specifically. Al-Ahram newspaper referred to the governor’s special note about the collapse of security in Itai al-Baroud thanks to the conflict between families.

He mentioned that the reasons behind these crimes are the collaboration between the ‘umdas and the brigands who are hired in some villages as ghafirs (ghuffara). He concluded his speech in Itai al-Baroud calling for the instant reporting of any

violation committed, and urged local authorities to mediate between local rivals and to take any preemptive action to prevent vendettas.\textsuperscript{129}

The police endured much hardship while chasing Adham and recruited special troops (\textit{al-ghafar}) to track him down. They finally killed him after one of his followers betrayed him and informed them of his hiding place. The police discovered that many peasants were supporting him. They were shocked that some local governors were also collaborating with him and paying him money to avoid his incursions. The newspaper in Cairo agreed that after his death peace and rule of law would be restored in the Delta.\textsuperscript{130}

**Nation and narration:**

Cairene newspapers also interpreted the murder of Adham as a symbol of the restoration of power, stability and security to the countryside. They repeated the official vision agreed upon by both the police and agricultural aristocracy. It is remarkable that the opposition, pro-government, and even pro-British newspapers all agreed on viewing Adham as an “outlaw”, “hitman” and “tyrant”.\textsuperscript{131} Moreover, it is rare to find differences between newspaper reports and police interrogations. Several stories were published about people’s reactions after Adham’s death, such as sheiks reciting prayers in mosques to thank God for getting rid of “the dangerous outlaw.” An \textit{Al-Ahram} correspondent added a “prophecy” that history would not forget the name of \textit{al-shawish Mahmoud Abu el-Ela} or of the police soldier who managed to kill Adham.\textsuperscript{132}

On the contrary, the narrative ballad “\textit{Mawal Adham al-Sharqawi}” describes Adham as a fierce fighter and brave “Lion” who was not afraid of the government “\textit{al-‘hukumah}”, and whose life story should be preserved in popular imagination and memorialized from one

\textsuperscript{129} - Al-amn fi al-Beheirah, \textit{Al Ahram}, May 5, 1920, 2. During the meeting, Ali Radi, the ‘umda of ‘izbat al-Tawfiqiyah who witnessed against Mahomud al-Sharqawi and endorsed his banishment in 1910, pledged to arrest Adham. See: Hamdi Radi, 11.


\textsuperscript{131} - Ibid.

\textsuperscript{132} - “Masar‘ Sahqi Kabir,” \textit{Al-Lata’if al-Musawarah}, October 31, 1921.
generation to the next. The ballad mourns Adham and describes his murder in a dramatic scene with Adham as the hero:

"For shame, my eyes, that you suffer from the blow of scoundrels
And shame on you, gunfire that you hit the body of a proud Man and rock it."

The ballad inverts the official story by mocking the unjust government; while Adham was bleeding he swore to dishonor the government by clothing the policemen with gauze veils instead of their uniform.

"If I live, Government, I'll make you wear cloth coverings
and gauze veils, instead of tarbushes".  

This dichotomy of Adham as both criminal and hero leads/compels us to rethink the pillars of Egyptian high culture (as shown in newspapers of the 1920s) and challenges the hegemonic historiography (which is still repeated by many historians today). The popular narrative of Adham al-Sharqawi provides us with an alternative resource regarding the role of peasants in modern Egypt and in the 1919 national revolution in particular. Nationalist historiography constructed a coherent and dominant image of the 1919 revolution; it attributed the main role in the revolution to urban bourgeoisie and rural aristocracy. Historians present “a unified story of the nationalist struggle and are meant to provide the nation with a shared understanding of the past. The narrative and its embedded myths are thus part of the glue that binds the collective.”

In the “nationalist myth”, peasants were most often represented as docile crowds and unconscious “masses” who were recruited and enlightened by the bourgeoisie and who gathered

133 The complete English translation of the ballad is cited in Larkin, “Brigand Hero,”.
135 Beth Baron, Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 2.
voluntarily around the political conscious leadership. However, the popular imagination embodied them as conscious collective actors. The ballad of Adham al-Sahrqawi begins with:

“Where am I to find people to recite the purport of my speech
People like al-Mu'ayyid when they memorize and recite the sciences 137
The incident that happened to a Sharqawi lion”

This prelude affirms the active role of listeners, it invites them to share Adham’s real story by reciting and spreading it. The ballad begins with an exclamatory question “where do I find people?” intimating that the real story needs supporters (Mu’ayyid) who can advocate on behalf of truth and justice. Margaret Larkin comments on the ballad’s introduction: “These two lines articulate the role, the quite deliberate rhetorical role, played by the audience listening to the recitation at hand. This notion of the importance of establishing truth by the repetition of a certain version of events is traditional in both classical and colloquial Arabic literature.”138 Therefore, I argue that the story of the “heroic criminal” restores the voice of peasants and avows their independent political history which was silenced by the nationalist myth.

**Popular Nationalism and Pedagogical Nationalism:**

The opposition between the folk narrative and the official narrative of Adham al-Sharqawi exemplifies Homi Bhabha’s argument that modern nations split between two contradictory narratives:139 the first is the “pedagogic” narrative which affirms unity, coherence, accumulation and continuation. The “pedagogical nation” creates a community out of difference and unifies cultural and social fragments into one imagined community. It “warrants the authority, legitimacy and primacy of the nation as the central political and social unit which

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137 - “al-Mu'ayyid” is a symbol of wisdom and justice, and “sciences” refers to history, wisdom and sensible tales.
collects the population into a people.”

The nationalist elites practice hegemony by representing its interests as collective or national interests and by creating an urgent threat, such as the outlaws, to hold society together and to unify it in one camp against the “Public Enemies”. Omnia Shakry states that “the redefinition of criminality” was part of a larger social and political process that occurred in tandem with the construction of the modern Egyptian state.

The pedagogical nation, however, is a fragile and unstable project because it cannot function without exclusion and fragmentation. It is always contradicted by “performative” narratives which are played out by marginalized groups in traditional celebrations, jokes, rumors and folkloric ballads such as Mawal Adham al-Shargawi.

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141 - El-Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*, 120.
Epilogue

Rashomon Effect: Adham al-Sharqawi’s Afterlife

The controversy around Adham did not cease in the years that followed his murder in 1921; on the contrary, it became a continuous source of inspiration for literature and politics. Meanwhile, many radio broadcasts, TV series, movies and novels adopted Adham’s complicated legacy in diverse ways. For example, in 1953 the Free Officers government initiated a new magazine, *al-Tahrir*.\(^{142}\) It was considered to be a platform for voicing the politics of the nascent republic, particularly concerning national culture and social reforms. Anwar al-Sadat was chosen to be the first editor in chief and he invited a spectrum of journalists and other intellectuals to write articles introducing readers to Egyptian national history, popular culture and folklore. The magazine was not alone in this regard; the regime paid similar attention to folklore and culture programs in radio and schools. Zakariyya al-Heggawy, the pioneer folklorist and playwright, was one of the founders of the state cultural plan in the 1950s. He participated in a state sponsored research project to conduct a comprehensive survey of popular culture and folkloric arts all over the country; he later wrote the first popular operette celebrating the culture of Egyptian peasants. The journey through Egypt’s villages during that survey enabled him to collect variant versions of the ballad of Adham al-Sharqawi, and he published episodes of his epic in *al-Tahrir Magazine* in 1954.\(^{143}\)

Although the epic was based on a collage of ballads, the 1954 narrative of Adham marked a distinct development. The narrative form changed from a simple plot sung in rhyming verse to an epic depicting a tragic hero whose life unfolds in parallel to the anti-colonial struggle

\(^{142}\) The magazine was named after Hai’et al-Tahrir, the newly populist organization that followed the abolition of political parties.

\(^{143}\) Al-Tahrir, December, 1954.
and the growth of nationalist consciousness. Al-Heggawy’s 1954 epic focused on Adham’s childhood and school time and weaved them with the struggle against the British occupation through the character of his school teacher, a member of the Nationalist Party (al-Hizb al-Watani). The school teacher, who didn’t exist in the 1920s ballad, plays a major role in Adham’s awareness of social injustice and colonial oppression. Al-Heggawy’s most significant development was the linking of Adham’s story to the Dinshway incident in 1908 through his teacher’s stories about national struggle.¹⁴⁴

Almost 10 years later, the magazine episodes were followed by a radio show about Adham al-Sharqawi in 1964, written by the poet Mahmoud Ismail Gad and directed for radio by Youssef al-Hattab. The radio program, in order to attract listeners and to make the Adham story more tragic, attributed his murder to the treason by Badran, one his fellows. By using the narrative of the folk hero tragedy, the program producers allegorized and romanticized the image of Adham as a hero.

After the program had begun airing, it enraged the al-Sharqawi family for the way it narrated Adham’s life and they decided to sue the national radio. They considered the depictions of Adham’s affair with his cousin and his involvement in robberies as an inappropriate representation of their hero and of the family’s reputation.¹⁴⁵ Since the 1950s, the al-Sharqawi family had become much more powerful and had raised its social status in al-Beheirah; Fathi al-Sharqawi, one of Adham’s relatives, became Egypt’s Minister of justice in early 1961. More ironically, Badran himself, who was a close friend and a fellow of Adham in the 1920s, showed

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¹⁴⁵ - Akher Sa’ah, February 5, 1964.
up after the release of the radio show and spoke to the press to try to correct the image that had stigmatized him.146

The National Radio had to stop the broadcast of the episodes after the al-Sharqawi family asked for 10,000 Pounds indemnity. The conflict over Adham’s image purred stemmed a debate in the newspapers around “Who Owns Adham?” For example, Farouq Abdel-Salam, a cultural critic, opposed the way Adham’s family dealt with the matter and their “unjustifiable confusion between the artistic character and the real personality.”147 Similarly, Youssef al-Hattab, the director of the radio program, complained of the legal complications they were involved in.

Figure (7): a dispute over Adham after the radio show. Akher Sa‘ah, February 12, 1964.

Such complicated legal disputes marked an ultimatum for the following adaptations of Adham such as the blockbuster movie directed in the summer of 1964 by Hussam el-Din Mustafa, a young cinema director who got his degree from and training in the United States. He

147. Akher Sa‘ah, February 12, 1964, 33.
started his work on the movie by visiting the al-Sharqawi family in al-Beheirah with his crew and introducing Abdullah Ghaith, the young actor who would play the role of Adham, to Badran. The movie narrative affirmed the regime’s ideological turn to state socialism in 1961 with the publication of al-Mithaq (The National Charter) as well as the state’s interest in cultural production and in folklore and popular literature (\textit{al-adab al-sha’bi}). The movie, released in 1964, was a considerable success, in part because Abdel Halim Hafez performed all the songs. It also adopted the epic narrative and the treason plot with minimal changes. Badran, in the movie, was replaced by a fictional character called Maghawri, who betrayed Adham and informed the police about his hideout in the mountains, but Adham got his revenge from him before being shot by the police.

![Image](image.png)

Figure (8): Hussam el-Din Mustafa, Abdullah Ghaith and Badran in Itai al-Baroud, al-Beheirah, Akher Sa’ah, February 12, 1964.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 34.
\end{itemize}
Despite the success of the 1964 movie, problems resurfaced in subsequent attempts to depict Adham. In 1985, Egyptian TV aired a new series on Adham that featured him as a charismatic and eloquent worker who incites his worker and peasant companions to revolt against the colonial authorities. The positive image depicted in the series, though, did not prevent another clash with the al-Sahrqawi family. They asserted that Adham, contrary to the TV series, was an educated notable and not a seasonal worker. One of his relatives spoke to *al-Gounhuriyya* newspaper, stating that “Adham spoke French fluently and was well off and responsible for managing his father’s land property.” The family also rejected many other aspects of the series plot, such as the presentation of the murder of Adham’s uncle, Mahmoud al-Sharqawi, while trying to save his daughter from drowning in a canal, and of the seclusion of Mahmoud al-Sahrqawi’s clash with landlords and colonial authorities.

Figure (9): Adham’s family calls for stopping the broadcast of the TV series, Al-Masa’a, 30 July, 1985.

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150 - Al-Masa’a, 30 July, 1985, 1.
151 - Ibid.
The multifaceted representations of Adham in newspapers, police records, family memories, nationalist discourse, ballads, radio shows, TV series and movies could represent an ideal case of what Karl Heider calls the “Rashomon effect,” in which a radical disagreement between ethnographers arises about how to assess and analyze the same social phenomena.\textsuperscript{152} Heider’s intention was to criticize positivist ethnographies and to show its shortcomings for understanding contradictory cultural, social and historical truths. However, one should also be aware of the limits of the constructivist approach, as contradictory historical narratives are often constructed in relation to one another and thus can’t be analyzed as entirely separate perspectives. They are always constituted through interplay, intertextuality and mutual adaptation, as we saw in the 1950s and 1960s versions the story of Adham al-Sahrqawi.

In this case, the contradiction between official (pedagogic) and folk (performative) narratives in the 1920s found a sort of reconciliation in the following decades. The development in the nationalist discourse, culminated in the Nasserism, attempted to resolve that tension between pedagogic and performative nationalisms by transforming the ballad of Adham al-Sahrqawi into a national epic and inserting his life story into a grand nationalist narrative.

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