INSURGENT GEOGRAPHIES: THE PRODUCTION OF TERRITORIAL LIBYA, 1835–
1935

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2022

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Cornell University, 2022

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation offers a panoramic reinterpretation of Libyan state-formation in light of Ottoman archival evidence and recent advances in critical geography, particularly revisionist approaches to the history of territory. Echoing Henri Lefebvre's description of space as the "ultimate locus and medium of struggle," I argue that the dynamic, frequently violent interaction of a diverse cast of networked social forces—local, transregional, Ottoman imperial, and European colonial—across a vast Saharan-Mediterranean theater produced the entity we now recognize as territorial Libya from approximately 1835 to 1935.

Territorial spatialization along the rural frontiers of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan is not reducible in theory to the enclosure of land or conquest of terrain—though both featured prominently within it—but also encompassed legal, diplomatic, technical-scientific, and ideological dimensions.

The process unfolded in two phases: Ottoman provincialization, which transformed these areas into a "pilot province" for Istanbul's ambitious development agenda, and Italian fascist colonization, which unified the country in the form of a colonial state after a twenty-year "pacification" campaign. Both phases unfolded at the expense of rural indigenous communities, who were targeted for disarmament, dispossession, displacement, and culminating in the ethnic cleansing of Cyrenaica in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Indigenous efforts to preserve local understandings of sovereign autonomy—up to and including "nomadic strategies" of guerrilla war—were the most historically and geographically significant factor in the production of Libyan territorial space.

Modern Libya's unique experience of territorial spatialization dislocated the country from the conceptual maps that guide us through transnational, regional, and local pathways of Global South history. Its ambivalent and fragmentary "geo-historical identity"—exemplified by the fact that Fezzan remains synonymous with "the middle of nowhere" in modern Turkish—is among the most enduring legacies of this process. Yet this inherited sense of Libya's rural interior as the Periphery of Peripheries belies the fact that upland Tripolitania, Fezzan, and inner Cyrenaica often took center stage in the high drama of late and post-Ottoman politics. More than a microcosm of transformations underway across the Empire in its final century, this region was a critical frontline of global struggles over resources, sovereign legitimacy, geographic knowledge, and the fate of mobile and nomadic populations. All of which is to say, the middle of nowhere is the heart of the world.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jonathan M. Lohnes is a globally oriented social scientist and historian of Afro-Eurasia. His work focuses on colonialism and knowledge production in the Sahara and Mediterranean in the late Ottoman period. He holds master's degrees in Ottoman and modern Middle East history from Cornell University and Binghamton University (SUNY), as well as a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Memphis.

For Victoria Leigh, Scarlett Viola, and Waylon Ambrose

in my own masochistic impulses). Jonathan's astute advice and continued interest have been a source of comfort and strength throughout this process.

I also want to acknowledge Nabil Bayakly, Kelvin A. Santiago-Valles, and Russell Rickford for their friendship, courage, and conviction. These critically engaged, public-facing scholars have been a profound inspiration to me and countless others. Their unflinching resolve and determination to push back against the Permanent War Machine, often at significant personal and professional risk, provided a valuable reminder of why I got into this line of work in the first instance.

My debts to Kent Schull are so numerous that they couldn't be repaid in a dozen lifetimes. He recognized a future Ottomanist in a precocious University of Memphis undergraduate and has shepherded me through the arduous path to PhD with singular generosity. Whatever I've accomplished in this strange little corner of academe is largely due to him. More than a loyal friend and confidant, Kent is truly family—our "guardian angel." A thousand thanks for everything, *hocam*. I can only hope for the opportunity to return a fraction of your kindness to others.

I also want to acknowledge fellow travelers and co-conspirators from Binghamton, Almería, Ithaca, and further afield who have enriched my life and made the frequently hellish experience of graduate school meaningful and worthwhile: Matt Hollis, Maddie Cullings, Sibel Karakoç, Jules Quinn, Chris Byrum, Travis Shutz, Şule Can, Burak Başaranlar, Shehryar Qazi, Emre Şahin, S.H. Kang, Andreas Guidi, Monazir Khan, Noelia and the Family Tripiana, Joaquín Hernández, Steve Knauss, Gökhan Terzioğlu, Rukmini Chakraborty, Max McComb, Ibrahim Gemeah, Emilio

Ocampo Eibenschutz, Ryan Purcell, Nate Boling, Özgür Dikmen, Zeyad Nabolsy, and Afifa Ltifi. Humblest apologies to anyone I overlooked.

Special thanks are also due to Kelly and Abbey Vincent for making the foothills of the Adirondacks feel like home. I learned a great deal from you both and will always cherish our time together amid the blue herons, flocks of goldfinches, snapping turtles, tree frogs, bunnies, no-see-ums, and freakishly aggressive mosquitos.

My in-laws, Jeff and Cynthia Brown, shouldered the burden of two seemingly interminable PhD processes, and never lost faith that it would all be worth it in the end.

My grandmother, Margie Snetman, is the matriarch and rock of my family, a true force of nature. Her longevity, intellect, wit, and stamina are nothing short of extraordinary, and I thank her from the bottom of my heart for all she has done for me.

My mother, Terry, has been my biggest booster and greatest champion from the moment I entered the world. She and my father, Don, gave everything they had to provide me with the opportunity to pursue my passions. I attribute all of my achievements to my good rearing in the Mid-South, along with their infinite compassion and support. What a long, strange trip it's been. I will never be able to express my love and gratitude sufficiently.

My Irish twin and frequent accomplice, Laura, has believed in me throughout this ordeal, and was always there to serve as sounding board or shoulder to cry on. Thank you sis.

Finally to my comrade and soul mate, my beautiful wife, Victoria Leigh Brown: our love has endured through more than most people could bear. Sickness. Poverty. Painful dislocation. Dreams indefinitely deferred. Despite all it's taken out of me, I have never regretted my decision to undertake this quixotic mission, because it led me to the love of my life. You are, by an order of magnitude, the most formidable person I've ever known, your dignity and grace an inspiration to everyone you meet. *Maybe I could be your only rider? Would you have me? I surrender.*

I dedicate this work to you, and to our beautiful children, Scarlett Viola and Waylon Ambrose, in the hope that a better world is just over the horizon, if we dare to struggle for it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE IS THE HEART OF THE WORLD

In the waning days of May 1915, young İhsan Aksoley was adrift and hopelessly demoralized. He and the rest of his cohort were approaching the end of their studies at the Imperial Military High School in Üsküdar. Inundated with reports about the ongoing siege of the Dardanelles, they had longed impatiently to join their comrades at the frontline for months. When the order finally arrived for his class to deploy, a medical examiner visited the campus to confirm that all the assembled recruits were in adequate fighting condition. Sorted into a group too young, gaunt, or infirm for combat, Aksoley resigned himself to waiting out the rest of the war as a spectator in Istanbul. He recalls having to hold back tears as he watched his classmates board a steamship at Vaniköy harbor, stomping their feet, waving their handkerchiefs, and belting out patriotic songs.

Aksoley's memoirs describe the ensuing weeks as an aimless, intensely melancholic period of his life. Along with the others deemed unfit for action—a rag-tag group drawn from every corner of the Empire: Baghdad, Edirne, Damascus—he passed his days playing practical jokes on junior faculty, his nights marinating in the folk ballads of classmates from Erzincan. Their mournful lyrics only amplified his ennui. Eventually, a second medical examiner took pity on him and allowed him to pass the physical inspection with the understanding that he would join the communications corps rather than an artillery division. Temporarily mollified, he took an apprenticeship at the radio depot of the Selimiye Barracks near Haydarpaşa on the Bosphorus shore. Though he was grateful for the opportunity to serve his

country in any capacity, he agonized over the safety and comfort he enjoyed being stationed just blocks from his childhood home. He tried to distract himself, but his thoughts returned involuntarily to Gallipoli, Iraq, the Caucasus, Hijaz, Suez, Macedonia, Romania, and the bare conditions of life in the trench.

His redemption finally arrived in the form of Enver Pasha, the celebrated hero of the 1908 revolution who by this time had risen to the rank of War Minister, married into the Ottoman dynasty, and become one of the most recognizable personalities in the public life of the Empire. Though Aksoley became one of Enver's closest confidants in the years ahead, his first encounter with this already legendary figure proved exhilarating and intimidating in equal measure. Curiously, he describes Enver's tone during this initial meeting as apologetic, as if he regretted being the bearer of bad news. Resting his hands on Aksoley's desk, he let out a plaintive sigh before giving the young soldier an assignment that would radically alter the direction of his life:

> "I'm terribly sorry to inform you that you are about to go somewhere quite far off."
>
> Elated, I leapt from my seat and asked, "Where is that, Herr Hauptmann?"
>
> "Somewhere exceedingly remote," he replied. "You'll only be able to take a few books and a handful of small personal effects with you."
>
> "To Erzurum, then?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Baghdad?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Hijaz?"

"No."

"Galicia?"

"No. Somewhere even more remote. A German submarine will escort you to the North African coast. From there you will travel on camelback to your destination: Fezzan."[1]

Fizan'a kadar uzak, as faraway as Fezzan. Libya's southwestern interior, a hyper-arid and scarcely populated region bordering Chad, Algeria, and Niger, has a peculiar resonance in modern colloquial Turkish, being roughly equivalent to "the middle of nowhere." Like fabled El Dorado, or the mysterious Timbuktu of the Victorian geographical imagination, Fezzan represents the edge of the known world: arcane and perilous, a literal and figurative *terra incognita.*[2] Everyday idioms allude to its obscurity so often that in 2013 a pro-government daily was obliged to ask, "Is There Really a Place Called Fezzan?"[3] Ankara's increasingly prominent role in the economic, political, and military affairs of the African continent undoubtedly colored

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[1] İhsan Aksoley, *Teskilat-ı Mahsusa: Enver Paşa'nın Sırdaşı Anlatıyor* (Istanbul: Timaş, 2016), 13-18. Aksoley's memoirs first appeared in serialized form in the magazine *Hayat Tarih* in the early 1970s under the title "A Turkish Officer's African Memories of the First World War." For background on Enver's long and controversial political career see M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789–2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Alp Yenen, "Internationalism, Diplomacy and the Revolutionary Origins of the Middle East's 'Northern Tier,'" *Contemporary European History* 30, no. 4 (2021): 497–512.
[2] D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Elias Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu: The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-21; Tor Benjaminsen and Gunnvor Berge, "Myths of Timbuktu: From African El Dorado to Desertification." *International Journal of Political Economy* 34, no. 1 (2004): 31–59; John Wright, "Terrae Incognitae: The Place of the Imagination in Geography," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 37, no. 1 (1947): 1–15.
[3] "Fizan Diye Bir Yer Gerçekten Var Mı?" *Sabah,* 8 November 2013.

this question.[4] It is perhaps unsurprising in that light that such remarks have become a mainstay of recent Turkish foreign policy discourse, exemplifying its belligerence as well as its frequent lapses into the absurd. As if to underscore the point, Devlet Bahçeli of the neo-fascist Nationalist Action Party (MHP) claimed in a recent parliamentary row over the deployment of Turkish soldiers to Libya that liberal opposition head Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu would struggle to locate Fezzan on a map, humorously quipping, "If you ask him to find it for you, he will point to the Philippines."[5]

That Fezzan should occupy this particular niche in the contemporary Turkish political and cultural vernacular seems arbitrary. Consider an alternative prospect: From a logistical perspective, the former Ottoman domains along the southern and eastern rim of the Arabian Peninsula—roughly corresponding to Yemen's Northern Highlands and the Saudi al-Hasa Governorate—were even more difficult to access from Istanbul than the Libyan provinces well into the twentieth century. Furthermore, as sites of perennial unrest they created as much strife or more for the imperial elite and its local representatives, giving rise to the anti-tribal "civilizing" rhetoric so often highlighted during the Ottoman field's mid-2000s postcolonial turn.[6] Fezzan's remoteness is a matter of imagination as much as topography, a

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[4] For background on recent Turkish foreign policy and the "New Scramble for Africa" see Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu, eds., *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?* (London: Routledge, 2021); Abigail Kabandula and Timothy Shaw, "Rising Powers and the Horn of Africa: Conflicting Regionalisms," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 12 (2018): 2315–2333.

[5] "MHP Genel Başkanı Bahçeli'den Açıklamalar," *CNN Türk*, 12 January 2020.

[6] Frederick Anscombe, "An A-national Society: Eastern Arabia in the Ottoman Period," in Madawi Al-Rasheed, ed., *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*

relative social construct as much as a measurement of absolute space. The image of

the Ottoman Sahara as the "middle of nowhere" has been highly consequential for

the development—perhaps underdevelopment—of Libyan historiography,

consigning the larger region by synecdoche to the margins of a half-forgotten past.[7]

Libya occupies a liminal place in social science and area studies research

traditions, situated at the boundaries of Africana, Middle Eastern, and

Mediterranean Studies. Indeed, it is a truism of Libya scholarship that Tripolitania is

"oriented" to the Maghreb, Cyrenaica to Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, and

Fezzan to the greater Sudan, each having followed a unique path dependent

trajectory according to its own equally unique historical tempo.[8] While it is true that

the territories comprising the State of Libya today were never administered by that

name before their colonial unification under Italian fascist rule in the 1930s, the

toponym has a much longer pedigree, deriving from classical antiquity.[9] Early Greek

philosophy, frequently adduced as the source of modern continental distinctions,

understood "Libya" to mean the landmass south of "Europe" and "Asia," which in

turn were divided by a network of interior waterways running from the Aegean to

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(London: Routledge, 2005), 21–38; Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[7] For insight into the theoretical challenges posed by notions of remoteness and marginality see Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele, "Remoteness Is Power: Disconnection as a Relation in Northern Chad," *Social Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (2019): 156–171; Erik Harms, Shafqat Hussain, et al., "Remote and Edgy: New Takes on Old Anthropological Themes." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1 (2014): 361–381; Anna Tsing, "From the Margins." *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no.3 (1994): 279–297.

[8] L. Carl Brown, "Maghrib Historiography: The Unit of Analysis Problem," in Michel Le Gall and Kenneth Perkins, eds., *The Maghrib in Question: Essays in History and Historiography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 4–16.

[9] By "State of Libya" I refer to the post-2011 political entity. As many commentators have noted, it is a state primarily in name.

the Sea of Azov.[10] V.Y. Mudimbe describes this metaphorical "Libya" as "a peripheral

place without knowable boundaries" that enabled the ancients to theorize about

migration, empire, and the dialectic of civilization and barbarism—the archetypal

Third World other at the center of their cosmology.[11]
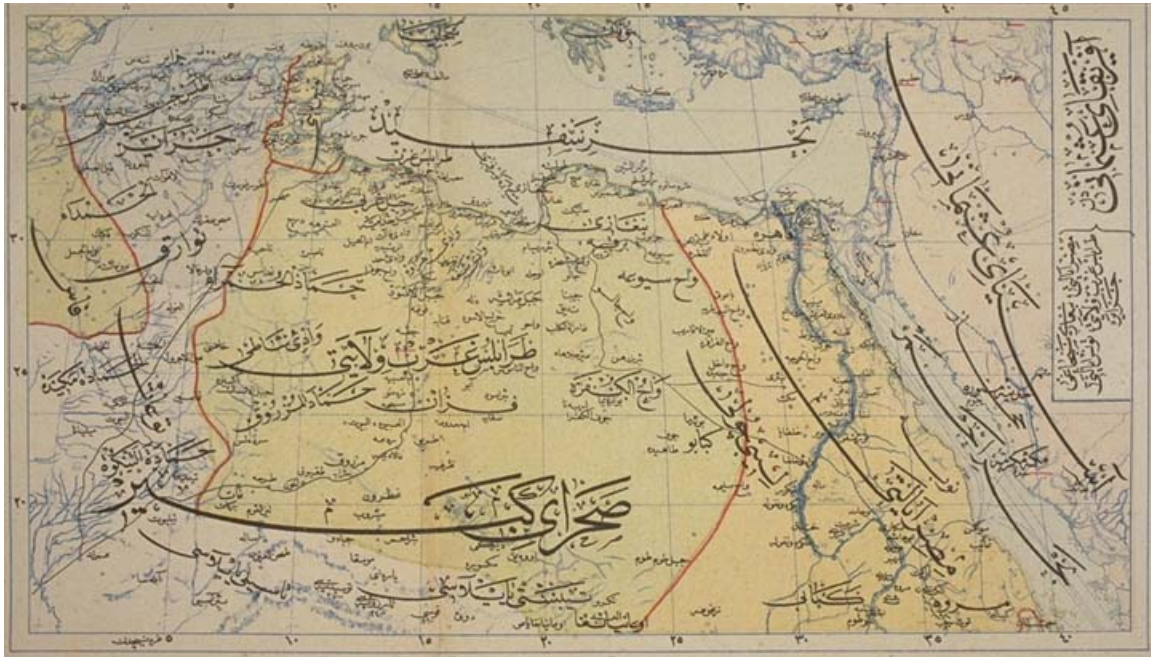
Figure 1: *Afrika-i Osmani*, **in Mehmet Nasrullah, et al.,** *Memalik-i Mahruse-i Şahaneye Mahsus Mükemmel ve Mufassal Atlas.* **David Rumsey Map Collection.**

If "Libya" is thus synonymous with the first recorded "invention of Africa," its

significations evolved in complex ways over time. In the Koine Greek of Ptolemy's

Geographia, "Libya" encompassed all of the portions of the African landmass west of

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[10] Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 21–23.

[11] V.Y. Mudimbe, "In the House of Libya: A Meditation," in Daniel Orrells et al., eds., *African Athena: New Agendas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 191–209. For additional background see the editors' prefatory essay to Part III, "Classical Antiquity and African Modernity" in Pierre-Philippe Fraiture and Daniel Orrells, eds., *The Mudimbe Reader* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 107–125.

the Nile known to the author and his contemporaries. By the time his writings

became widely available to European audiences in printed Latin near the turn of the

sixteenth century, "Africa" had replaced "Libya" as the preferred catchall

designation.[12] Though Ptolemy significantly influenced Arab-Islamic classical

scholars, who translated his work as early as the ninth century, that tradition

seldom if ever identifies "Africa" by a single place name. Medieval Muslim

geographers from al-Idrisi to Ibn Khaldun offer vivid portraits of kingdoms and

cities, latitudinal and climatic zones (*aqlim*), mountains, rivers, and islands, but

generally elide altogether the issue of continental boundaries that preoccupied their

European forbearers. In their treatments, "Africa" (*Ifriqiya*) typically refers

exclusively to Tunis and a handful of small but historically noteworthy towns in the

outlying areas. The category "Libya" is by and large expunged, while the south-

central Mediterranean coast and its hinterland are simply labeled "Tripoli" or

"Tripolitania" (*Trablusgarb*), a convention the Ottomans adopted as well.[13]

Hassan al-Wazzan, the Andalusian refugee, Moroccan diplomat, kidnapped

slave, Christian convert, and voyager between worlds better known to his western

interlocutors as Leo Africanus, developed a unique, broadly influential synthesis of

these divergent paradigms. His *Description of Africa*, written amidst the global

turmoil of the early sixteenth century, borrows its continental terminology from

European geographies while drawing liberally and idiosyncratically from the Arab-

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[12] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 125–152.

[13] Ibid. Tenth-century Yemeni philosopher al-Hamdani is an anomaly in this regard. Though he also uses "Ifriqiya" in a limited sense to refer the area around Tunis, he goes on to describe "Libya" as a nebulous region stretching from Abyssinia to greater Sudan. See footnote 4 on 327 in the same work.

Islamic canon, imbuing the subject with a degree of coherence not found in either of the earlier genres.[14] For al-Wazzan, the African social, environmental, and linguistic mosaic was held together in its totality by political and commercial relationships—trade, warfare, domination, and tribute extraction—as well as the migration and intermingling of peoples. Its five distinct regions included Egypt as a self-contained unit; "Barbary," stretching from Tunis to the Atlas Mountains; "Numidia," a narrow band south of the Mediterranean littoral; and Bilad al-Sudan (the "Land of the Blacks"), where he had extensive experience as an emissary of the Moroccan Sultan to Gao and Timbuktu. "Libya," the fifth and final continental subdivision according to this scheme, was an interstitial desert zone with a largely nomadic population that functioned as a portal between the northern and southern regions. This usage survived in some Ottoman texts, albeit in modulated form, into the late Hamidian period: for example, the term "Libyan desert" (*Libi çölü*) is emblazoned conspicuously across southern Cyrenaica, almost to the banks of the Nile, in the stunning map of "Ottoman Africa" (*Afrika-i Osmani*) included by Mehmet Nasrullah in his seminal *Atlas of the Well-Protected Domains* (*Memalik-i Mahruse-i Şahaneye Mahsus Mukemmel ve Mufassal Atlas*) (Fig. 1).[15]

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[14] Hassan al-Wazzan spent his formative years as a diplomat in the Songhai Empire, Mamluk Cairo, and Ottoman Istanbul, whence he was captured by Christian corsairs during a return trip to Morocco. Rising Portuguese naval power, Selim I's wars against the Mamluks and Safavids, and colonization of the Americas provide the indispensible context for his thought. See Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels.* For a bracing revisionist take on this period see Alan Mikhail, *God's Shadow: Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Liveright, 2020).

[15] Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels*; Mehmet Nasrullah, et al., *Memalik-i Mahruse-i Şahaneye Mahsus Mükemmel ve Mufassal Atlas* (Istanbul: Shirket-i Murettibiye

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the end of the Great War, as colonial powers partitioned the African landmass and dismembered Ottoman sovereignty in Southwest Asia, the Maghreb emerged as a distinct regional formation, separate from the "Middle East" (a British strategic conceit later reified and invested with cultural significance by Cold War area studies) and "Africa" (now including parts of the western Red Sea Basin more closely connected to the economic and cultural life of the Arabian Peninsula and Indian Ocean than any imagined "sub-Saharan" unity).[16] Of course this modern idea of the Maghreb had numerous medieval Islamic antecedents, being hazily configured in Arabic texts as the "western" half of the Arab-Muslim heartland. In addition to Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco, it often included Iberia, the Canary Islands, and parts of the Sahara and Sahel. Abdelmajid Hannoum convincingly argues that French imperialism "appropriated, domesticated, and transformed" these local imaginative geographies in order to render *its* Maghreb—coterminous with the racialized notion *Afrique blanche*—legible, self-evident, and natural.[17] Hannoum describes the invention of the Maghreb as a colonial technocratic process in which powerful military and diplomatic institutions worked symbiotically with the scientific establishment (archaeologists, geographers, orientalists, ethnographers)

Matbaasi, 1909). The invention of "Ottoman Africa" in the context of the nineteenth-century Ottoman restoration is the subject of chapter 1.

[16] Abdelmajid Hannoum, *The Invention of the Maghreb: Between Africa and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Abbas Amanat et al., eds., *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Ziad Bentahar, "Continental Drift: The Disjunction of North and Sub-Saharan Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 1 (2011): 1–13. Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*, 65–68.

[17] Hannoum, *Invention of the Maghreb*.

to produce the desired spatial effect. He is unequivocal that this was an exclusively Francophone phenomenon: "By the late 1920s…the region had emerged as a French colonial zone in North Africa that was separate from the Middle East, itself a post–World War I British invention. The Maghreb includes mainly Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and not so much Libya."[18] Wilfrid Rollman has lamented the entrenched view of the Maghreb as a periphery of other, more dynamic world regions: sub-Saharan Africa, the "Arab Middle East," and the Mediterranean. To this we might reasonably add that Libya is marginalized twice over as the poor relation of North African area studies.[19]

Hannoum's understanding of Ottoman realities is highly relevant to this discussion, foregrounding the contradictions that make "Libya" so difficult to locate within research geographies inherited from colonial social science. Among other misconceptions and generalizations, he claims the Ottoman Empire (or "Ottoman Turk"—he uses the two interchangeably), was "neither a historiographic state nor a cartographic state, and less so an ethnographic state," but relied entirely on the "army to conquer" and the "*millet* system to rule."[20] The Ottoman bureaucracy lacked the desire, means, or empiricist disposition to make knowledge an

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[18] Ibid, 5.

[19] See Rollman's introduction to Le Gall and Perkins, eds., *Maghrib in Question.* Similar conclusions can be drawn from *Journal of North African Studies* 26, no. 6 (2021), a special issue on "Gramsci and the Uprisings in North Africa," which scarcely mentions post-decolonization Libya at all. Evidently the communist revolutionary, who died as a result of ten years of abuse in a fascist prison, has little to say about Mussolini's flagship settler colony and "Mediterranean bulwark." For an illuminating take on the uneasy relationship between the anticolonial Gramsci and postcolonial studies see Timothy Brennan, "Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory: 'Southernism,'" *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 143–187.

[20] Hannoum, *Invention of the Maghreb*, 17–18.

instrument of conquest. Even after Istanbul began to "imitate" European modes of governance and technological achievements in the late eighteenth century, the "key relationship" within the state remained "that between the suzerain and his subjects." As late as the turn of the twentieth century, the Ottomans exhibited little interest in "modern science" or its associated techniques of governmentality. The imperial elite was, moreover, totally disconnected from the North African population, having refused or failed to integrate local notables into their insular, hermetically sealed "Ottoman club." Consequently, Ottoman perceptions had at most a negligible impact on local casts of mind, still less the imaginative constitution of Maghrebi space.[21]

This portrait of Ottoman geographical consciousness, state-society relations, and imperial rule on the North African frontier is unrecognizable from the perspective of the Ottoman field. In fact, Istanbul's conquest of Tripolitania, Tunisia, and Algeria—known collectively as the "Western Garrisons" (*Garp Ocakları*) after they were subdivided into three distinct provinces in 1587—coincided with an Ottoman cartographic renaissance. As active participants in the geopolitics of the "age of exploration," the Ottomans commissioned maps to illustrate the splendor of their capital, outmaneuver their Habsburg rivals in the Mediterranean, and gather intelligence on worlds beyond their frontiers across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.[22] The notion that imperial authorities were disinterested in the populations

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[21] Ibid, 21–25.

[22] Pınar Emiralioğlu, *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (London: Routledge), 2016. For additional background see Palmira Brummett, *Mapping the Ottomans: Sovereignty, Territory, and Identity in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015);

they conquered is equally specious. For instance, Piri Reis' *Kitab-ı Bahriye*, the crowning achievement of early modern Ottoman cartography, contains richly detailed descriptions of the recent history and local customs of Djerba, Tunis, and Tripoli.[23] During the global crisis of the seventeenth century, Ottoman cartographers continued to produce important works, most notably Katip Çelebi's *Cihannüma.* If anything, the science of geography (*ilm-i coğrafya*) became an increasingly important tool of provincial administration around this time, as Istanbul responded to an unprecedented wave of internal challenges, especially at the frontiers. Judging by graphic representations of the well-protected domains in Hamidian era school textbooks, Ottoman cartographic practices remained fluid until the twilight of the Empire, constantly transforming to meet the ideological needs of the ruling elite.[24]

Regarding the constitution of that elite, Hannoum ironically seems to endorse the colonial view—shared by many postcolonial nationalists—that the North African provinces belonged to the Ottoman world only superficially or symbolically,

Antonis Anastasopoulos, "Imperial Geography and War: The Ottoman Case," in Sahar Bazzaz, et al., eds., *Imperial Geographies In Byzantine and Ottoman Space* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 111–132; Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For a beautifully illustrated review of early modern Ottoman map production see Ahmet Karamustafa, "Military, Administrative, and Scholarly Maps and Plans," in J.B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography Volume II: Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 209–227.

[23] Emiralioğlu, *Geographical Knowledge*, 100.

[24] Ibid, 143–155. On the late nineteenth century see Benjamin Fortna, "Change in the School Maps of the Late Ottoman Empire," *Imago Mundi* 57, no. 1 (2005): 23–34. The notion that early modern Ottoman elites were unconcerned with their historical and historiographical self-representation is, by the same token, demonstrably incorrect. See Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2003.

with an aloof, self-segregating military-administrative caste lording over a hapless

subject population.[25] On the contrary, as several provincial social histories have

shown, elite formation in the Ottoman Maghreb was a dynamic, reciprocal process

whereby officials dispatched from the capital developed their own regional power

bases in competition with ambitious local notables who simultaneously tried to

enter the fray of imperial politics. In other words, the experience of crisis and

adaptation in these regions tracked with the empire-wide reconstitution of the

Ottoman social formation in the seventeenth century.[26] Even Algeria, an extreme

macro-sociological outlier that Tal Shuval describes as a professional "dead end" for

enterprising Ottoman bureaucrats prior to the French invasion, conforms to this

general pattern: the reproduction of its provincial ruling class through exclusive

recruitment from Anatolia and the Aegean Islands—which certainly did curtail the

aspirations of talented locals—was a strategy for maintaining close relations with

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[25] For a representative postcolonial nationalist perspective see Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib: An Interpretive Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[26] Tal Shuval, "The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 3 (2000): 323–344; Ehud Toledano, "The Ottoman-Egyptian Elites," *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (2000): 87–95; Jane Hathaway, *The Politics of Households in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of the Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For background on the economic underpinnings of Ottoman provincial political culture see Ariel Salzmann, "An Ancien Régime Revisited: 'Privatization' and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Politics and Society* 21, no. 4 (1993): 393–423. For an important early foray into these themes focusing in particular on Ottoman Libya see Rifaat Abou-El-Haj, "An Agenda for Research in History: The History of Libya between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15, no. 3 (1983): 305–319.

Istanbul when the region's importance waned after the closure of the Habsburg maritime frontier.[27]

In sum, this accumulation of discourse has created a fragmentary and ambivalent "geo-historical identity" for the Ottoman Sahara, dislocating it from the conceptual maps that guide us through transnational, regional, and local pathways of Global South history.[28] The invention of the Maghreb isolated Libya from the remainder of the African landmass, despite their ancient semantic equivalence and the intricate web of alliances and rivalries, political and commercial, linking its coast and hinterland to the greater Sudan. Libya's post-Ottoman trajectory diverged sharply from the rest of North Africa with the arrival of Italian colonialism, most dramatically under its fascist iteration after 1922. As the crown jewel of a resurrected Roman Empire, its African heritage receded past the vanishing point and an integral Mediterranean essence took its place. Reoriented toward the Italian Peninsula, colonial Libya thus abruptly decoupled from the rest of the Maghreb, an exclusively Francophone epistemic abstraction and geopolitical project.[29] Finally, as the quintessential Ottoman backwater, Libya's experience of the most formidable and influential institution in the modern history of Southwest Asia is rendered oblique, even insignificant. As the expression *Fizan'a kadar uzak* makes plain, this is a metageographical no man's land, "the middle of nowhere."

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[27] Tal Shuval, "*Cezayir-i Garp*: Bringing Algeria Back into Ottoman History," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 22 (2000): 85–114.

[28] Jakob Krais, "Re-Centering Libya's History: Mediterranean Bulwark, Defender of Africa, or Bridge between Continents?" *Lamma: A Journal of Libyan Studies*, no. 1 (2020): 13–36.

[29] Ibid and Hannoum, *Invention of the Maghreb.*

In a 1994 interview with American folk music icon Ry Cooder, desert bluesman and Malian cultural ambassador Ali Farka Touré made an off-the-cuff remark that epigrammatically captures the spirit of this thesis: "For some people," he said, "when you say 'Timbuktu' it is like the end of the world, but that is not true. I am from Timbuktu, and I can tell you we are right at the heart of the world."[30] Expressed slightly differently, I depart from other provincial histories by recasting the Ottoman-Saharan frontier as an unlikely nucleus of late imperial contentious politics and frontline of global struggles for justice and sovereignty. Tracing Libya's evolution from Ottoman province to fascist colonial state, I show that its alleged heterotopic remoteness is in fact a geopolitical mirage. On the contrary, this ostensibly empty corner of an empire in decline was a critical pivot of Afro-Eurasian affairs from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth: the production of territorial space in Ottoman and Italian colonial Libya made the region ground zero for some of the most dramatic reconfigurations of the modern world system rather than a "mere reflection" of processes originating elsewhere.[31]

Imperial Networks and the Production of Territory

Coincidentally, 1994 also saw the release of the monograph that more than any other provides the template and political lodestar for the present study, Ali Abdullatif Ahmida's magisterial *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonialism, and Resistance*. A tour-de-force synthesis of historical sociology and

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[30] Ali Farka Touré and Ry Cooder, "Talking Timbuktu," *Folk Radio UK*, 7 May 2010.
[31] I am building on points articulated in Isa Blumi, *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (London: Routledge, 2011), especially the methodological reflections in its introduction.

social history from below—informed by Marxist political economy and critiques of

Eurocentrism, as well as subaltern-studies-adjacent theories of quotidian

resistance—Ahmida's work places Islamic solidarity, tribal military and

organizational structures, and previously unstudied oral traditions at the center of

the Libyan state's origin story. While the adjective "revolutionary" is sometimes

hastily or haphazardly applied to social science and humanities scholarship, *The

Making of Modern Libya*—and Ahmida's entire oeuvre—are genuinely worthy of

that designation, being almost singlehandedly responsible for excavating and

publicizing the forgotten genocide perpetrated by Italian fascism in Cyrenaica in the

early 1930s (a subject to which I return in chapter 4, as well as the section on

method below).[32] I have no intention to replace, rewrite, or even substantially revise

his arguments, which would exceed my skill set as an historian even if I were so

bold. Rather, my modest objective is to revisit the somewhat unfashionable theme of

state formation from different points of theoretical departure and in conversation

with a distinct, if intermittently overlapping, base of primary sources. "Disciplined"

as an Ottomanist and globally oriented by the historiographical developments of the

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[32] Ali Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) and "Nineteenth-Century Reform in Ottoman Libya," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 325–348 anticipate some of Ahmida's conclusions while placing the emphasis rather more decisively on Ottoman institutional factors. For insight into Ahmida's intellectual and political orientation see especially Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1989); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

last two decades, I offer a panoramic reinterpretation of the origins of territorial

Libya in light of the "new imperial history" and multidisciplinary spatial turn.[33]

Each of these variables informs the particular manner in which I diverge

from the classic works of Libyan provincial and social history, most notably Ahmida.

First, I reckon directly with the metageographical contradictions laid out in the

preceding section, asking whether it is possible, or even desirable, to weave

together the diverse strands that appear to pull Libya's ambivalent "geo-historical

identity" in opposing directions. The artificial boundaries of contemporary area

studies—which carve up Africa, the Middle East, Mediterranean, and Sahara into

discrete and freestanding worlds—would have been incomprehensible to the actors

I follow throughout this text, despite the fact that many of them helped create those

same divisions. Dynastic and colonial empires, operating in concert and competition

with one another, determined their horizons of political, social, and cultural

expectation, a reality I have tried to reflect in the narrative presented here.[34]

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[33] As Stephen Howe notes in a recent essay reappraising the "new imperial history," scholars of the 1960s–1970s decolonizing generation considered empire a "fusty, hidebound, backward-looking" subject. In those years, historians broadly redirected their attention to formerly colonized peoples and cultures, taking anticolonial nationalism as their "main object of study" (and, I would add, *methodological* nationalism as their unexamined frame of geographical reference). The ensuing critical return to empire post-2000 likewise registers a new generation's unwillingness to be "contained" by the nation's disciplinary boundaries. See the introduction to Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London: Routledge, 2010); Antoinette Burton, "Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating 'British' History," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, no. 3 (1997): 227–248.
[34] On the distinction between dynastic and colonial empires see e.g. Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650: The Structure of* Power (London: Springer, 2002); Seymour Becker, "Russia and the Concept of Empire," *Ab Imperio* 3–4 (2000): 329–342.

On one hand, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan had a quintessentially

Ottoman nineteenth-century experience. After Istanbul's reassertion of direct

central government control near the end of Mahmud II's reign—a long and

tumultuous process I describe in chapter 1 as a "provincialization," in deliberate

contradistinction to the more conventional "second Ottoman occupation"—Ottoman

Libya became the testing ground for a number of policies later pursued across the

Empire, especially its frontier regions: market openings, administrative

reorganization, debt-financed development, and an approach to rural, tribal, and

nomadic subject populations that frequently vacillated between discretionary co-

option and brutal dispossession. In contrast to the stereotyped image of a

perpetually-contracting empire nearing the end of its historical rope, the turn of the

twentieth century was a time of Ottoman frontier *expansion*—into the Persian Gulf,

Red Sea, and Lake Chad Basin—and the Libyan provinces were at the forefront of

this dynamic.[35] Consequently, as I discuss in chapters 2, 3, and 4, the region also

became an important flashpoint of the Empire's domestic and foreign policy by the

turn of the century, first as a warehouse for Hamidian era dissidents, then as a

bellwether of post-Ottoman colonial violence.[36]

On the other hand, as Mostafa Minawi has shown, Istanbul's precarious

status as both a subject and object of late Victorian "juridical colonialism" put the

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[35] Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016). Also see the editor's introduction to A.C. S. Peacock, ed., *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), especially 10–11.
[36] On similar developments in the Levant see Michael Provence, "Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011): 205–225.

question of Ottoman sovereignty at the center of the diplomatic and legal disputes surrounding African partition.[37] This double bind became most evident in the Ottoman-adjacent regions annexed to French Equatorial Africa circa 1900. In an apparent embrace of new international legal norms that sanctioned territorial acquisition by diplomatic decree, the Ottoman government laid claim to areas south of provincial Libya such as Kanem-Borno and Wadai. Despite their longstanding position within the imperial orbit—as I show in chapter 1, these polities entered into quasi-tributary relationships with Istanbul, via Tripoli, as early as the 1840s, if not before—France waved away Ottoman assertions on the basis that might determined right in the final instance. Negotiating on these "terms of engagement" proved equally disastrous for the Ottomans on the African Red Sea coast, where they lost the Somali port of Zeila to Britain and the important commercial hub of Massawa to Italy around the same time (Khedival Egypt had leased both of these *de jure* Ottoman cities from Istanbul and governed them more or less directly since the middle of the century). All of which is to say that the Ottomans participated energetically, if awkwardly, in the Scramble, "playing the diplomatic hand they were dealt" as a "half-civilized," "partially-European" state by pursuing territorial aggrandizement as a strategy of self-preservation.[38]

I would take this a step further: the erosion of Ottoman sovereignty in the Maghreb, greater Sudan, and Red Sea Basin was an integral part of a larger story,

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[37] Mostafa Minawi, "International Law and the Precarity of Ottoman Sovereignty in Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *International History Review* 43, no. 5 (2021): 1098–1121 and the aforementioned *Ottoman Scramble for Africa.*
[38] Ibid.

what Richard Reid calls "Africa's revolutionary nineteenth century."[39] To paraphrase him slightly, the wide-ranging, often internally-initiated transformations that took place in these regions from the 1830s to the 1930s—in economic relations, political forms, military practices, and spatial arrangements—reflected broad patterns unfolding across not just Africa, but all of Afro-Eurasia, as heightened global interaction created new contradictions, opportunities, solidarities, and antagonisms. Far from being supine recipients of these processes, Africans—crucially including African empires—were key agents of historical and geographical change: they had their own agendas and frequently drew their foreign would-be occupiers into pre-existing "local scenarios" that in turn determined political outcomes every bit as much as the Maxim gun or cartographer's pen. The provincialization and colonization of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan—which featured a diverse cast of local and transregional actors including Benthamite liberals, Saharan merchants, rebellious tribes, Sufi evangelists, and East African mercenaries—are a testament to this reality. It is a story best interpreted as a "collision of imperialisms" rather than a neat, binary process of foreign domination met by African collaboration or resistance.[40]

What then is the appropriate scale at which to explore the production of Libyan territorial space? Which overlapping social fields take center stage, and how can their dimensions be apprehended spatially? Keeping with Frederick Cooper's influential critique of globalization as an explanatory framework, this dissertation

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[39] Richard Reid, "Africa's Revolutionary Nineteenth Century and the Idea of the 'Scramble,'" *American Historical Review* 126, no. 4 (2021): 1424–1447.
[40] Ibid.

examines long-distance networks (Ottoman, Saharan, British and Italian colonial) across a geography that is "more than local, less than global."[41] The paradoxes of world-region and continent described above become even more vexed when we consider Libya's internal social divisions, especially the fault line separating *bahr* (the archipelago of cosmopolitan port cities where the majority of the population clustered) from *badia* (the arid or semiarid desert or steppe, the abode of the peasantry, or more literally "Land of the Bedouin"). On the surface this study appears to tilt decisively in favor of the rural interior. In chapters 1 and 2, its focal points are the Western Mountain (*Jabal al-Gharbi*), Ghadamis, Murzuk, and Ghat; in chapters 3 and 4 the prospects of colonial occupation propel the narrative momentum east, toward the Cyrenaican Desert, Green Mountain (*Jabal al-Akhdar*), and string of oasis settlements nestled between the Egyptian and Rabyanah Sand Seas. Yet it is precisely because of the density of their multidirectional connections—to London, Rome, and Istanbul, but also Kanem-Borno, Wadai, and Darfur on the desert side, as well as Italian colonial possessions along the western Red Sea littoral—that these "remote areas" assumed a leading role in the geopolitics of the period. Accordingly, I frame this study around Fernand Braudel's well-known characterization of the Sahara as the "second face" of the Mediterranean: if Mediterranean history "has felt the pull of its desert pole as well as that of its

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[41] Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective." *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 189–213. Cooper further develops and refines these insights in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

European pole" Ottoman Libya's rural near-hinterland sat at the center of that magnetic field.[42]

The multiplication and entanglement of geographies, historiographies, and perspectives that are an unavoidable result of this kind of expansive transimperial narrative can quickly overwhelm narrator and reader alike. A deliberate, reflexive approach to social theory and historical method is therefore essential to provide stable points of reference and thematic coherence.[43] In the end, the state-formation concept that grounds so many earlier histories of the nineteenth-century Ottoman frontier—itself a byproduct of the neo-Weberian revival of the state in 1980s political sociology—proved incapable of answering the range of questions posed by my sources. As an overarching framework, state formation is at once too capacious and too limiting, threatening to reify an idealized abstraction while implicitly excluding processes—economic, environmental, technological, and symbolic—that were central to developments in Ottoman and colonial Libya.[44] The search for an

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[42] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), especially Part III, "Boundaries: The Greater Mediterranean." For more contemporary appraisals see Judith Scheele, "Connectivity and its Discontents: The Sahara – Second Face of the Mediterranean?" *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie/Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology* 145, no. 2 (2020): 219–236; Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, "The Mediterranean and 'the New Thalassology,'" *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 722–740.

[43] Alp Yenen, "Approaching Transnational Political History: The Role of Non-State Actors in Post-Ottoman State-Formation" in Steffi Marung and Matthias Middell, eds., *Transnational Actors – Crossing Borders: Transnational History Studies* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2015), 261–270.

[44] Timothy Mitchell, "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77–96 has been the most enduring critique of attempts to "bring the state back in" à la Theda Skocpol, though an equally compelling exploration of "state effects" can be found in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close

alternative theoretical scaffold ultimately led me to the corpus of Marxist and

otherwise "critical" human geography—the tradition associated with figures such as

David Harvey, Edward Soja, Derek Gregory, and above all its doyen, Henri

Lefebvre—which I would suggest is far better suited to address the confounding

heterogeneity of the archive.[45]

Echoing Lefebvre, this study's foundational assumption is that "space is the

ultimate locus and medium of struggle," simultaneously the place, or arena, of social

conflict and its paramount object.[46] It rejects the convention that space is

"ontologically prior to social relations" in favor of a kinetic, constructivist approach

(as the title of his most famous work, *La production de l'espace*, implies, space

making is an *active process*).[47] While Lefebvre's interventions have most

prominently influenced critics of late-capitalist urbanism, he also made significant

contributions to the so-called state debate, particularly through the notion of

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Encounters of the Deceptive Kind," *Current Anthropology* 42, no.1 (2001): 125–138. For an exhaustive reappraisal and reworking of these themes that also engages thoughtfully with Marxist state theory, especially the work of Nicos Poulantzas, see Bob Jessop, *The State: Past, Present, Future* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

[45] Middle East scholars across the social sciences and humanities have availed themselves of this conceptual tool kit since the 1990s. However, as a recent review of this literature makes clear, such studies have overwhelmingly privileged urban over rural areas. See Amy Mills and Timur Hammond, "The Interdisciplinary Spatial Turn and the Discipline of Geography in Middle East Studies," in Seteney Shami and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, eds., *Middle East Studies for the New Millennium: Infrastructures of Knowledge* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 152–186. For a recent spatial history of the Eastern Mediterranean focusing on networked links between port cities, interior towns, and the rural countryside see Cyrus Schayegh, *The Middle East and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[46] Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xviii.

[47] Daniel Neep, "State, Space, and the Sources of Social Power: Reflections on Michael Mann and Henri Lefebvre," *Rivista di Storia delle Idee* 2, no. 1 (2013): 71–80; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Wiley, 1991).

"abstract space." A tripartite critique of "geopolitical economy," the state form, and their associated spatial effects, "abstract space" is the outcome of the homogenizing pretensions of capitalist markets and modern governmental institutions: their desire to facilitate rational calculation in production and exchange, comprehensive control in the realm of statecraft, and illusions of geographical uniformity in ideological representations. In the Lefebvrian understanding, spatial abstraction is characterized in each of these convergent instances by immanent, though often well-concealed violence, suggesting the need for a framework that can account for them all at once.[48]

Enter Stuart Elden, who has argued that the Lefebvrian category "abstract space" is approximately isomorphic to "territory" (or "territorial space"), a frequently invoked but under-theorized buzzword in recent political geography. Elaborating on insights scattered throughout the radical philosopher's bibliography, Elden has assembled a sophisticated model for analyzing the production of territory across four matrices, which he defines broadly as economic, strategic, legal, and technical. Orthodox Marxism, he claims, has tended to equate territory rather narrowly with *land* (*terre*): a property relation, commodity to be exchanged, or finite resource whose value is expressed in terms of ground rent or agricultural yield.[49] The cognate term *terrain* meanwhile appears to be the exclusive concern of

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[48] Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, "Henri Lefebvre on State, Space, Territory," *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 4 (2009): 353–377.

[49] Stuart Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 799–817. "Land" in this sense also overlaps with Lenin's description of "economic territory" in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*: "to the numerous 'old' motives of colonial policy, finance capital has added the struggle for the sources of raw materials, for the export of capital, for spheres of influence, i.e.,

military science and its subordinate disciplines: a work site or battlefield environment, the control of which determines one's ability to establish social control and maintain order. For Elden, territory encompasses both of these registers—land in the sense of political economy and terrain as it is figures in the war plans of generals—but is not reducible to either. The critique of territorial space as a totality must also address its legal dimensions—sovereignty, jurisdiction, authority—and the spectrum of calculative techniques used to objectify them: coordinate geometry, surveying, and cartography do not simply represent territory, but are "actively complicit" in its production and reproduction.[50]

Thus conceived, territory is not a "static backdrop," "container of political action," or "passive object of struggle." Rather, Elden insists, it is "something shaped by, and a shaper of, continual processes of transformation, regulation and governance." Colonialism, anticolonial resistance, border regimes, enclosure, the forcible partition and unification of regions, infrastructural development, resource competition, scientific measurement, quantification, and mapping—all of these are fundamentally territorial issues, and each informs the theory and practice of territory in its own unique manner. Furthermore, though territory and population are pitted against one another in the Foucauldian conception, they are in fact intimately and congenitally intertwined, emerging simultaneously as "new ways of rendering, understanding and governing the people and land." Biopolitics and

for spheres for profitable deals, concessions, monopoly profits and so on, economic territory in general." See Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, *A Theory of Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) for a novel reappraisal.

[50] Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory." I revisit the issues he raises here in chapter 3 as part of my discussion of the Sanusi Order and its territorial orientation (or lack thereof).

geopolitics should therefore be read as complimentary rather than antagonistic projects: "to control territory requires the subjugation of the people; to govern the population requires command of the land."[51]

Charles Maier has argued that the century after 1850 witnessed an unprecedented wave of territorial spatialization worldwide. In response to centrifugal trends unfolding across the globe—increased imperial competition, market penetration of countryside regions, and various forms of institutional collapse—regimes from East Asia to Latin America pursued a series "controlled transformation" aimed at consolidating their political and economic power, a process he calls "reconstruction on a world scale."[52] Maier's work could be read at one level as a more empirically oriented counterpart to the theoretical speculations of Elden and Lefebvre, though it is necessarily limited in its capacity to convey local specificity by its immense range. This dissertation charts a similar thematic course, albeit through a more modest expanse. Zooming in on rural Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan between 1835 and 1935, I follow the tracks of local, Ottoman, and imperial agents, exploring their connections to transregional networks, as well as their complex interactions with the landscape and one another. As I show, the production of territorial Libya implicated figures from across the Ottoman world— Tripoli notables turned imperial liberals like Hassuna D'Ghies, dissident exiles like Abdülkadir "Cami" Baykurt and Sami Çölgeçen, Unionist intellectuals like Mehmet

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[51] Stuart Elden, "How Should We Do the History of Territory?" *Territory, Politics, Governance* 1, no.1 (2013): 5–20; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave, 2009).
[52] Charles Maier, *Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Nuri (Conker) and Mahmut Naci (Balkış), patriotic volunteers like Enver and

Mustafa Kemal—as well as a rogues gallery of resident diplomats, career officers,

and foreign mercenaries who exemplified the European colonial presence in the

region from the Ottoman restoration through the period of fascist occupation.

As Maier quite poignantly demonstrates, the "communities we used to label

casually as nomadic or tribal" bore the social and ecological brunt of the process I

interrogate here. Despite their reciprocal, profoundly consequential involvement in

the global production of territorial space—not infrequently as empire-builders in

their own right—indigenous societies were, in his words, "slowly but inexorably

subjugated" after a "long and difficult retreat."[53] Pick a point on the globe, find the

same ignominious picture: among the First Nations of North America or the "desert

Bedouin" of the Ottoman frontier, in the villages of Central Asia and the Russian

Imperial Caucasus, in the African savannas. Nevertheless, he insists, the "indigenous

defenders of these sprawling regions" occasionally managed, against impossible

odds, to "give pause to the steamroller of 'civilization.'" His narrative begins with

one such episode, on 25 June 1876 in the valley of the Little Bighorn River, where an

alliance of Lakota, Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne forces under the leadership of

Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, devastated the US Army's 7th Cavalry Regiment.[54]

Such defiant "last stands" were also instrumental to the production of Libyan

territorial space under both the Ottoman provincial and Italian colonial

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[53] Ibid, 3.
[54] Ibid, 1–14; See Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) for an illuminating case study of an indigenous empire that "eclipsed its various European rivals in military prowess, political prestige, economic power, commercial reach, and cultural influence," around the turn of the nineteenth century.

administrations. Though Istanbul seized Tripoli and installed a new, hand-selected

Ottoman governor in a relatively bloodless operation in 1835, the path from

Gharyan through Ghadamis to Ghat was significantly more arduous. Tribal

communities of rural Tripolitania and Fezzan—most notably forces from the

Western Mountain loyal to a respected sheikh named Ghuma bin Khalifa—clashed

with the restoration government for two decades, notwithstanding periodic

attempts by central authorities to co-opt and deputize them. Sheikh Ghuma was

captured and exiled to Trabzon in 1842, only to escape thirteen years later, return

to the mountains, and immediately resume the struggle against the regime that

sought to disarm, dispossess, and forcibly settle his community—a stunning display

of recalcitrance. But not entirely unique: deported en masse to the outskirts of

Benghazi from their ancestral homeland around Mosul in the 1880s and 1890s,

hundreds of Hemvend Kurds labeled bandits by the Hamidian regime returned to

northern Iraq on foot (and later absconded across the border with Qajar Iran).

     Yet the Ottomans were not infrequently obliged to seek accommodations

with tribal power at the frontier (notably including Anatolian Kurds, who, as Janet

Klein shows, served as Abdülhamid's local enforcers in historical Armenia at

precisely the moment Yıldız Palace was ruthlessly cracking down on the

Hemvend).[55] Istanbul developed its most enduring and consequential partnership in

Africa with the Sanusi Order (Sanusiyya), an enigmatic Sufi fraternity with roots in

Algeria and Hijaz whose networks throughout the Sahara profoundly shaped the

social and political life of the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. As

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[55] Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Mostafa Minawi has shown, the initially tepid and suspicious relationship between the Ottoman government and the Sanusiyya blossomed into a close geopolitical alliance in the context of African partition.[56] Building on his insights, I explore the austere, quietist brotherhood's turn from avoidance protest to millenarian armed struggle against multiple colonial empires after 1900. If the Sanusi Order's long anticolonial war (1911–1932) forestalled Libya's colonial unification for nearly a generation, so too did it have intense ripple effects across post-Ottoman Southwest Asia, as I discuss in chapter 3. The territorialization of Ottoman provincial and Italian colonial Libya was bookended by two twenty-year period of (not infrequently horrific) violence culminating in apocalyptic defeats for the indigenous communities of the hinterland. Apart from the eerie narrative symmetry, I would suggest this is quite instructive about the nature of the process in general.

<u>History from Above: Blind Spots in the *Vue D'Ensemble*</u>

The singular achievement of Ali Ahmida's scholarship, the through line running from *The Making of Modern Libya* to his most recent study of the fascist colonial genocide in Libya, is his successful recovery of victim narratives or, as he calls them, "forgotten voices."[57] It is the fruit of a life's work collecting survivor testimony and conducting innovative readings of poetry, proverbs, and other colloquial sources. His herculean effort to uncover and publicize this inglorious history—deliberately obfuscated by Italian gatekeepers—before all those who lived

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[56] Minawi, *Ottoman Scramble for Africa.*

[57] Ali Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (London: Routledge, 2020) and *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (London: Routledge, 2005).

through it pass away, gives lie to Gayatri Spivak's famously pessimistic outlook on the feasibility of subaltern speech.[58] This is "history from below" in the most committed, fully realized, and admirable sense of the term: a populist retelling of state and nation from the standpoint of the conquered, relayed with profound sympathy for ordinary people and the ways they interpret the cataclysmic rending of their society under colonial occupation.

The present study cannot lay claim to that tradition. Simply put, the geography of its conception militates against any aspiration to center the lived experiences of the local population. I conducted original research for this project in Istanbul, London, and Upstate New York, far from the Libyan National Archives, much less the daily realities of individuals and communities on the Ottoman-Saharan frontier around the turn of the twentieth century. Rather, the sources I compiled, in Ottoman and modern Turkish, Italian, French, and English, might be said to constitute the documentary traces of territory—or more precisely, the evidence left in the wake of its production. It is a repository that speaks primarily from the vantage point of the Ottoman, British, and Italian imperialists. Thus, while it often attempts to represent, in the Saidian sense, the subject populations of the rural hinterland, it rarely offers them a platform to testify on their own behalf.

For many Ottoman historians, "statism" has become a watchword for the field's intrinsic methodological shortcomings, a deep-seated problem even such an eminence as the late Donald Quataert felt he overcame only at the end of a long and

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[58] Ali Ahmida, "When the Subaltern Speak: Memory of Genocide in Colonial Libya 1929 to 1933," *Italian Studies* 61, no.2 (2006): 175–190; Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

distinguished career.[59] To be sure, the epistemological and narrative obstacles he

has described still constitute a major challenge to scholars working on regions that

fall within today's Turkish Republic, which were his primary focus. Such difficulties

are even more acute for historians who wish to explore the Arabic-speaking

provinces of the Empire, especially during the passage from Ottoman rule to various

post-Ottoman political formations. Postcolonial state archives in North Africa and

Southwest Asia have long been notoriously hard to access, forcing researchers to

navigate labyrinthine security bureaucracies in normal times, shuttering altogether

in times of war and social unrest (never mind the destruction, redaction, or

secretive dispersal of potentially inflammatory material, a nearly universal practice,

as recent controversies in Italy and England amply demonstrate).[60] These issues

have obviously intensified and come into even sharper relief since the 2011

uprisings.[61]

Even in exceptional instances where subaltern experiences of the Ottoman

Empire's collapse have been meticulously documented, they cannot necessarily be

taken at face value. As Eileen Ryan discusses in a thoughtful reflection on the

contested nature of history and memory in late-twentieth-century Libya, a team of

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[59] Kent Schull, "The Impact of Donald Quataert's 'History from Below' on Ottoman and Turkish Studies," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no.1 (2014): 126–128; Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[60] Omnia El Shakry, "'History without Documents': The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 920–934. On suspicious Italian archival silences see Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya* (I revisit this issue in chapter 4). On a similar case involving the British National Archives and document purges related to end-of-empire concentration camps in Kenya see Caroline Elkins, "Looking beyond Mau Mau: Archiving Violence in the Era of Decolonization." *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (2015): 852–868.
[61] El Shakry, "'Vexed Archives," 920–923.

local scholars working alongside the celebrated Wisconsin-Madison Africanist Jan

Vansina began collecting testimony from veterans of the anticolonial struggle in

1978 under the auspices of the new Libyan Studies Center in Tripoli (*Markaz*

Dirasat Jihad al-Libiyin Didda al-Ghazw al-Itali). While Ryan considers the forty-

three published volumes of their findings an invaluable source, she hastens to add

they do not offer an unmediated picture of wartime realities. The political context of

the project—the Gaddafi regime's desire to marginalize the Sanusi elite after

overthrowing the monarchy in 1969—is frequently at odds with insurgent

memories of the brotherhood's leading role. Moreover, the editors put an additional

filter in place by translating the testimonials they gathered from the local dialect

into Modern Standard Arabic. Perhaps most egregiously, the research teams

conducted their interviews at large, open-to-the-public forums at a moment when

accusing or commending a neighbor for collaboration or resistance in the early

1930s was still a highly charged act.[62]

  Omnia El Shakry notes in a recent survey of the post-2011 Middle East and

North Africa archival landscape that this litany of complications has compelled

historians to be more resourceful in pursuit of alternatives, whether in the form of

family holdings, private letters, business records, or first-person interviews. In the

same spirit, this dissertation relies on Ottoman archival material—primarily

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[62] Eileen Ryan, *Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), especially the postscript, "Essay on Sources: Memories of Resistance in Libyan Oral History," 173–181. She goes on to note that the tidy distinction between collaboration and resistance frequently blurred in practice: for example, locally recruited colonial troops often left arms and ammunition behind after skirmishes with Sanusi raiding parties, hoping their nominal opponents would find them and add them to their weapons stocks.

documents originating in the civil and military bureaucracies and Yıldız Palace—as well as British government records, published Turkish and Italian memoirs, international press reports, longer form journalism, travelogues, and colonial techno-scientific literature dealing with themes from cartography to military aviation. In the second half of the final chapter, having reached the end of the Ottoman paper trail, I frequently cite a number of incriminating autobiographies, particularly Italian General Rodolfo Graziani's reflections on the counterinsurgency he masterminded in Libya after 1923, *Verso il Fezzan* and *Cirenaica Pacificata*. In another context these might be called "perpetrator" sources—Graziani writes matter-of-factly about interning Cyrenaica's civilian population in concentration camps (*campi di concentramento*, or *mu'taqalat* in Libyan Arabic) in the late 1920s and early 1930s—the study of which is, to paraphrase Dan Stone, as necessary as it is unpleasant.[63] Overall I have treated my documents as "sites of contested knowledge" rather than transmitters of absolute truth, "reading between the lines" to extract something of the "neglected voices of average people."[64] But the fact remains that they unquestionably represent the view *par le haut*.

In Donald Quataert's final public address before his untimely passing in 2011, he began by defining Ottoman "history from below" in negative terms.

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[63] Dan Stone, *Fascism, Nazism and the Holocaust: Challenging Histories* (London: Routledge, 2020), chapter 6, "Structure and Fantasy: Holocaust Perpetrators and Genocide Studies." For additional critical perspective on perpetrator sources and their role in Holocaust historiography see Wulf Kansteiner, "Success, Truth, and Modernism in Holocaust Historiography: Reading Saul Friedländer Thirty-Five Years after the Publication of 'Metahistory,'" *History and Theory* 48, no. 2 (2009): 25–53; Federico Finchelstein, "The Holocaust Canon: Rereading Raul Hilberg," *New German Critique*, no. 96 (2005): 3–48.
[64] Schull, "History from Below" and Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain.*

Whatever else the term might imply, "it is not," he insisted, "history from above—the history of the state, or of state elites, of policy or war makers, or, as it is presently written, the history of the Eastern Question."[65] Quataert's instinctive suspicion of the view from above—with its indelible connotations of imperial rivalry and geopolitical brinksmanship in the greater Middle East—is well founded, and calls to mind other, equally dismal associations: as geographer Peter Adey notes, "since arrival of the aerostatic balloon at the end of the nineteenth century…no perspective has been more culpable in war, violence, and security than the aerial one."[66] Indeed, by the second half of the twentieth, it became synonymous with the "logistics of perception"—reconnaissance techniques that supplied ground forces with information about the battlefield terrain that was as vital as their ammunition.[67]

Yet the above-below binary outlined by Quataert and widely accepted by social historians has a curious, paradoxical genealogy. Though movements across the early-twentieth-century political spectrum celebrated aviation and the omniscient perspective made possible by aerial photography, Italian fascists were the most vocal supporters of these revolutionary devices, heralding their practical utility and rhetorical value as symbols of techno-modernity, optimism, and patriotism. No doubt in part because he was aware of these connections, Lefebvre

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[65] Subsequently published as Donald Quataert, "History from Below and the Writing of Ottoman History," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 34, no. 1 (2014): 129–134.
[66] Peter Adey, Mark Whitehead, and Alison Williams, eds., *From Above: War, Violence, and Verticality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[67] Antoine Bousquet, *The Eye of War: Military Perception from the Telescope to the Drone* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), chapter 1, "Visibility Equals Death."

unequivocally rejected the god's-eye-view (*vue d'ensemble*) as a tool of ideological control and state repression, the instrument of spatial abstraction par excellence. However, as Jeanne Haffner shows in her fascinating cultural history of aeriality in mid-century France, the synoptic perspective ironically created the conditions of possibility for the emergence "social space" in the Lefebvrian sense, as well as the spatial critique of capitalism "from below" with which the ecumenical French New Left—Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Michel de Certeau—remains closely identified.[68]

From the early 1920s, aerial photography attracted attention for its civilian and scholarly potential, in addition to the military applications that became apparent during the Great War. One early adopter, Africanist and ethnographer Marcel Griaule, used airplane photos to document the spatial organization of agricultural fields and villages belonging to the allegedly "secretive" Dogon people of northern Cameroon. Noting that the checkered patterns he saw from the air also appeared in miniature on sanctuary walls and woven into funerary blankets, Griaule claimed to have unveiled a "harmoniously integrated cultural system" never before detected by an outsider. His acolytes applied the same principles to studies of rural France in short order. Amid this interdisciplinary enthusiasm, French policymakers enlisted sociologists and urban planners to collaborate on problems of city life using revelatory aerial technologies. The bureaucracy possibly got more than it bargained for, as it was here that the intertwining of the social and the spatial in the air had its most lasting effect. Seeking to discover the root causes of social discord in the famously troubled Parisian council estates (*grands ensembles*), government-

68 Jeanne Haffner, *The View from Above: The Science of Social Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

sponsored research teams began to examine them from the sky. Elaborating a

theory of social space latent in the works of Griaule and his contemporaries, they

reached a shocking conclusion: the problem was located not in the architectural

features of the modernist buildings themselves, but rather in the spatial

organization of cities across France.[69] By shifting the analytical frame from the

technocratic problem of the high-rise complex to the inherent structural inequities

of the suburb (*banlieue*), these studies paved the way for a radical turn toward the

quotidian perspective of urban residents, the same one championed by Lefebvre and

his cohort. In other words, "the view from above gave rise to the view from

below."[70]

If the above-below relation is dialectical rather than a static opposition, as

Haffner seems to suggest, then it is reasonable to ask: can the *vue d'ensemble* be

redeemed? Can there be a people's history from above? Supposing a definitive

answer would in either case be less illuminating than the narrative possibilities

opened by the question itself, let us consider two undated synoptic images—one

roughly from the time period when my narrative begins, another roughly from the

year it comes to an end—and their implications for the social history of Ottoman

and colonial Libya. The first, Ottoman archival file HRT 2115, is a hand-illustrated,

south-up orientation map, almost certainly mid-nineteenth century in origin,

showing the location of major salt deposits in Central Africa, as well as the region's

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid, especially the introduction and chapter 4, "Modeling the Social and the
Spatial: 'Social Space' in Postwar French Social-Scientific Research."

political divisions (Fig. 2).[71] It is a typically "statist" visual artifact that invites the user to occupy an imagined position in Istanbul, gazing down on the Maghreb and African interior. This map has many noteworthy features: its color-coded latitudinal zones recall the *aqlim* of medieval Islamic cartography; the Libyan provinces dwarf an inexplicably shrunken Algeria; tribal lands boldly labeled "Tuareg," "Tubu," and "Awlad Suleiman" are figuratively invested with autonomous political authority akin to that of the Central Sudanic Kingdoms. Most striking of all, however, is the picture it paints of the era's commercial networks: the three major trade routes indicated— Ghadamis to Timbuktu, Ghat to "northern Sudan" (roughly northern Niger), and Murzuk through Bilma to Borno—suggest a high degree of political-economic integration between the Ottoman capital and faraway desert side entrepreneurs.

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[71] On map orientation conventions see Mick Ashworth, *Why North Is Up: Map Conventions and Where They Came From* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

Figure 2: "Central African salt deposits in the vicinity of Dirkou [Niger], also known as Bilma, and neighboring Islamic regimes." Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) HRT 2115. Date unknown.

The second image, part of a series of lantern slides depicting Italian colonial

Libya, housed at Columbia University's Media Center for Art History, is an aerial

photograph of Ghadamis, 702 kilometers southwest of Tripoli (Fig. 3). It is

impossible to determine the anonymous photographer's intentions from the photo

alone: was it taken in the course of a military operation, reconnaissance mission, or

scientific survey expedition? These distinctions are ultimately less important than

the larger geopolitical reality such images convey. As Mark Monmonier notes in the

famous opening lines of *How to Lie with Maps*, "[portraying] meaningful

relationships for a complex, three-dimensional world on a sheet of paper or a video

screen, a map *must* distort reality."[72] Even the most sophisticated topographic chart

is limited in its capacity to represent more than surfaces, areas, and planes; the

vertical extent and ordering of social life, social inequality, goes unmentioned. By

contrast, the Italian pilot's snapshot of Ghadamis—and aerial photography

generally—reveals the "volumetric spatiality" of territory in ways that make it

immediately intelligible, even obvious. As I argue in chapter 4, Italian fascism sought

to apprehend, control, and define Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan vertically,

from horizon to subsoil. While the hegemonic aspiration manifest in the god's-eye-

view went largely unfulfilled—Graziani belatedly discovered that older and cruder

technologies could accomplish what bombs and reconnaissance flights could not—

counterinsurgent determination to "secure the volume" of territorial Libya radically

altered the country's landscape, transformed the conduct of guerilla warfare, and

exercised a wide-ranging influence on colonial military and policing strategy in

much of the global south between the world wars.[73] The entanglement of above and

below exemplified by the Italian aerial photograph or the Ottoman south-up map is

thus an ineluctable fact of imperial, spatial, and social history, which I have tried to

mirror through a judicious balancing of perspectives.

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[72] Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.
[73] Stuart Elden, "Secure the Volume: Vertical Geopolitics and the Depth of Power," *Political Geography* 34 (2013): 35–51.

Figure 3: Ghadamis from an Italian cockpit. Columbia University, Media Center for Art History, Libya during the Italian Colonial Period. Date unknown.

Insurgent Geographies

By titling this thesis *Insurgent Geographies*, I underscore that popular struggle—especially though not exclusively in the sense of the armed uprising—was the most historically and geographically significant factor in the creation of Libyan territorialized state space. To illustrate that point, I pursue local, transregional, Ottoman, and European colonial networks across a vast Saharan-Mediterranean theater, focusing on the economic, strategic, political-legal, and techno-scientific dimensions of territorial spatialization from the 1830s through the so-called interwar period.[74] I analyze this process by examining four broadly interconnected

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[74] I qualify the interwar periodization for two reasons. First, because the transformation of Libya from Ottoman province to Italian colonial state, a process that unfolded from 1911 (if not before) until 1931, does not correspond to the conventional timeline; and second, because the term implies an absence of armed

episodes, each of which constituted an important turning point. For heuristic

purposes, these might be called 1) the *province*, 2) the *prison*, 3) the *commons*, and

4) the *colony*. The diverse activities signified by these terms—enclosure of land,

domination of terrain, performance of sovereignty, militarization of landscape, and

ideological representation of space—are in fact continuous, overlapping expressions

of a procedural totality, which I call the production of territorial Libya.

       Chapter 1, "The Invention of Ottoman Africa," investigates the production of

Ottoman provincial space in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan from the end of

Mahmud II's reign to the advent of the Hamidian regime in 1876. Of course this

timeline coincides with the conventional dating of the Tanzimat, a period still

frustratingly characterized in much Ottoman scholarship as one of undifferentiated,

mimetic reforms after the lagging Empire's "discovery" of universal Europe.

Building on recent revisionist histories—which have instead described the

"Tanzimat reforms" as heterogeneous effects produced by complex agendas

operating at multiple concentric scales—I describe the emergence of a rival

Ottoman imperial project for Libya, concocted by an improbable alliance of liberal-

minded Ottoman technocrats, local comprador-bourgeois elements, and

transnational financial houses. Seeking to transform restoration Libya into a "pump

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hostilities after 1919 which clearly does not describe the situation in this region or
the global south generally. See Tarak Barkawi, "Decolonising War," *European Journal
of International Security* 1, no. 2 (2016): 199–214; Robert Gerwarth and Erez
Manela, "The Great War as a Global War: Imperial Conflict and the Reconfiguration
of World Order, 1911–1923," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (2014): 786–800. For a
similarly useful discussion focusing on the post-Ottoman Eastern Mediterranean see
James Gelvin, "Was There a Mandates Period? Some Concluding Thoughts," in Cyrus
Schayegh and Andrew Arsan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the
Middle East Mandates* (London: Routledge, 2015), 420–432.

for capital," this nebulous coalition embarked on a wide-ranging reconstruction program centering on administrative standardization and infrastructure development, most of which was underwritten by foreign direct investment. Crystalizing in the late 1840s and 1850s, this program made Ottoman Libya an early test case—a "pilot province"—for policies subsequently enacted in other frontier regions. Though provincialization was a modest success, it came largely at the expense of tribal communities in Tripolitania and Fezzan: indeed, the process only began in earnest after a twenty-year campaign of forced disarmament, dispossession, and settlement, establishing a pattern that would come to define political and social life in the region for the ensuing century. Finally, the material construction of Ottoman provincial space in Libya had an important ideological corollary: as the imperial liberal cartel pushed deeper into the Sahara, the ruling elite began to understand itself, for the first time, as "African" power, a conceptual shift whose aftershocks reverberate down to the present, as the top of the present introduction would suggest.

Chapter 2, "*Şeref Kurbanları*: Istanbul Unionists and the Penal Colony at Hamidian Libya," examines the lengthy and tumultuous reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1908) through a Libyan prism. Though many of the developmentalist policies of the foregoing years continued apace, the consolidation of power around Yıldız Palace and intensification of geopolitical rivalries across Afro-Eurasia transformed the regional landscape in new and unexpected ways under his administration. Most notably, from the middle 1880s, provincial Libya was inundated with exiles from around the Empire—left radicals and national separatists from the Balkans, tribal

"bandits" from the Ottoman-Qajar borderlands, Dashnaks and other Armenian revolutionaries, and white-collar "Young Turk" activists from Istanbul—leading foreign and domestic observers to analogize "Tripoli" to the Imperial Russian gulag, a "Saharan Siberia." Why did the Hamidian regime construct a penal colony in the Sahara? Following a group of seventy-eight high-profile Unionists banished to Libya after a foiled coup plot in 1896, this chapter shows how the commercial, strategic, and political-legal imperatives of territory intersected with the burning question of the Empire's domestic politics—the indefinite deferral of the Young Ottoman constitutional dream—making the region a volatile flashpoint of several overlapping conflicts. Many of the Libyan exiles rehabilitated after 1908 would form an important counterhegemonic bloc at the twilight of the Second Constitutional Period, and continued to influence the course of politics in North Africa and Anatolia for years after the Ottoman collapse.

Chapter 3, "Reluctant Militants: Colonialism and Sanusi Resistance on the Ottoman-Saharan Frontier," pivots east from Saharan Tripolitania and Fezzan in order to examine the most important social force in the wider region, the Sanusi Order, or Sanusiyya, a "mystical fraternity" based in Cyrenaica whose tendril-like networks stretched across the Maghreb and greater Sudan. From the moment of its inception, a number of highly ideological discourses accumulated around the brotherhood that continue to distort our understanding of its organizational structure, motivations, and behavior. For the imperial grand strategists and racial conspiracy theorists of the late Victorian age, the Sanusiyya constituted a rising Islamist threat, not just to European colonialism in Africa, but the entire "white

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world order." Likewise, for postcolonial nationalists across the formerly Ottoman world and beyond, it was an anticolonial, proto-national, and perhaps commendably xenophobic social movement established to oust European interlopers from Islamic lands. Modern critical scholarship, meanwhile, has often fixated on the Order's bona fides as an embryonic "state" in an otherwise anarchic outback—what, in the colonial lexicon of French Morocco, might be called *bilad al-siba* (the "land of abandonment" or "land of dissidence").[75] I reject each of these frameworks in favor of a spatial analysis that begins with the *zawiya*, the small-scale religious settlement I describe as the cellular form of the nineteenth-century Saharan social formation. Examining daily life inside these frontier communities, I argue that the brotherhood had a relational understanding of social space akin to rights on commons, which it consistently tried to preserve through peaceful means. For most of its history, the Sanusi Order favored avoidance protest over violence, retreating into the desert whenever it felt pressure from Istanbul, whose sovereignty it freely acknowledged. Yet by the turn of the twentieth century, colonial propaganda became a self-fulfilling prophecy: partnering with the Ottomans, the Sanusiyya reluctantly embraced armed militancy in response to French and Italian encirclement. After the Great War, the brotherhood continued the fight to recover its diminishing autonomy, waging guerilla campaigns against multiple European armies and influencing the course of national struggles as far away as Anatolia.

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[75] See Daniel Rivet's useful critical entry on "Siba" in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, as well as Minawi's discussion of *terra nullius* in "International Law and the Precarity of Ottoman Sovereignty."

The fourth and final chapter, "Italian Colonialism and the Geometry of

Counterinsurgency," examines the military and techno-scientific dimensions of the

Sanusiyya's two-decade "small war" against liberal and fascist Italy. It begins with a

number of Unionist and Italian colonial descriptions of the landscape in order to

illustrate the competing visions and imaginative geographies of two "beggar

imperial" powers on the eve of the 1911 invasion. CUP elites had their own

modernist designs on the region, a still inchoate progressive agenda to revitalize

Saharan commerce and promote Islamic solidarity under the Ottoman banner. The

Italians, by contrast, sought to impose a Euclidean rationality on the former

Ottoman provinces, to overwrite the mediated space of the *vilayet* and Sanusi

commons with the reticulated gridlines of the colonial state. Italy's plan to unify

Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan—an anomaly in the post-Ottoman world, whose

states were generally shaped by the kinds of transfer and partition policies that

"turned the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Anatolia into an enormous arena of

experimental demographic engineering"—encountered stiff resistance from the

outset.[76] Deeply embedded in the social landscape of the Sahara and able to draw

on material support from across the Eastern Mediterranean and African interior, the

Sanusi used small raiding parties and mobile tactics to spectacular effect for years.

Responding to these challenges, as well as the unique difficulties posed by the

militarized natural environment, Graziani and the other architects of the

"pacification campaign" developed a three-dimensional strategy to secure the

would-be colony's area, perimeter, and volume.

[76] Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 24.

The area-wide and volumetric aspects of Italian counterinsurgency doctrine, defined respectively by the substitution of Northeast African colonial recruits (*ascaris*) for metropolitan soldiers and the widespread use of airplanes for "armed reconnaissance" (*ricognizione armata*) and terror bombings, produced few tangible results. Most of inland Cyrenaica remained openly defiant twenty years after the first Italian landing. Where they failed, however, the perimetric strategy of barbed wire enclosure succeeded with remarkable brutality, as Graziani's forces systematically depopulated the eastern half of the country to make way for an army of Italian settler colonists. In colonial Libya, the counterinsurgent-as-geographer thus prepared the way for the geographer-as-field- scientist, establishing the conditions of possibility for the surveying, mapping, quantifying, and cataloguing of the territorial state. The first triangulated map of the country at a 1:1,000,000 scale was only completed in the early 1930s, after the extermination of much of the indigenous population of Cyrenaica had already been accomplished. The figure credited with establishing geography as a field of human inquiry—the first scholar to attempt a measurement of the terrestrial globe and the first to "design a map of the *oikoumene*"—was the Cyrene Greek mathematician Eratosthenes, an irony no doubt lost on the military and technocratic perpetrators of Italy's colonial genocide. The discipline's violent homecoming in the post-Ottoman Sahara would appear to confirm Yves Lacoste's notoriously grim proclamation: *la géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre.*[77]

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[77] Serena Bianchetti, "The 'Invention' of Geography: Eratosthenes of Cyrene," in Bianchetti, Mechele Cataudella, et al., eds., *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography: The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 132–149;

I.

THE INVENTION OF OTTOMAN AFRICA

<u>Introduction</u>

In the early 1820s, as he approached the twilight of his life and peak of his international influence, jurist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham developed a brief, intense, and utterly serendipitous interest in the affairs of the Ottoman state. As he began working on the outline of his magnum opus, *Constitutional Code*, two events obliged him to intervene directly in political upheavals along the Empire's northern and southern Mediterranean shores. First, in late February 1821, was the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence. Bentham had recently admitted a number of young, London based philhellenic activists to his inner circle—notably including pet apprentice John Bowring, future Governor of Hong Kong and primary instigator of the Second Opium War—and they quickly persuaded him to lend his name and intellectual firepower to the cause.[1]

The elderly philosopher, who had concluded his native Britain would never adopt his reform proposals during his lifetime, followed the rise of post-Napoleonic liberal states in Iberia, South America, and the Caribbean with unbridled enthusiasm, regarding them as prospective laborites in which to test his theories. The Greek uprising against Istanbul furnished Bentham and his devotees with a similar opportunity to implement their modern, rational, universally translatable program of utilitarian legal reform (Bentham went so far as to assure Simón Bolívar in private correspondence that resurrected Greece, like Jean-Pierre Boyer's Haiti,

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[1] Philip Schofield, *Utility and Democracy: The Political Thought of Jeremy Bentham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 304–336.

would be a natural ally of Gran Colombia).[2] As Mark Mazower observes with typical

acuity, "The Benthamites were, from this perspective, precursors of those late

twentieth-century technocrats who fanned out across the globe from Europe and

the United States, advising governments on how to manage their people's affairs."[3]

Eighteen months later, as Bentham threw himself into the Greek issue with

his usual tirelessness, the second turning point came in the form of a young

expatriate in traditional North African Muslim attire named Hassuna D'Ghies. Scion

of a Tripoli sharifian family with close ties to the Ottoman satellite regime of Yusuf

Karamanlı, D'Ghies spent his formative years studying European languages and

Islamic sciences while cultivating an impressive network of contacts in Timbuktu,

Algeria, Egypt, and Istanbul. At his father Muhammad's behest, he had made Paris

his operating base for the previous decade, during which time he earned a living as a

luxury importer, travelled widely, read the likes of Bentham and Vattel, and built a

reputation as a passionate, albeit uniquely critical and reflective, abolitionist.

Bentham took an immediate shine to this aspiring protégé—now residing in London

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[2] Ian Coller, "African Liberalism in the Age of Empire? Hassuna D'Ghies and Liberal Constitutionalism in North Africa, 1822–1835," *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 3 (2015): 529–553.

[3] Mark Mazower, *The Greek Revolution: 1821 and the Making of Modern Europe* (New York: Penguin, 2021), 248. On the global "liberal moment" of the early nineteenth century see Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History* (London: Verso Books, 2014); David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (New York: Palgrave, 2010); Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). For more on Bentham's entanglements with these various emerging liberal polities see Lorenzo Cello, "Jeremy Bentham's Vision of International Order," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 34, no.1 (2021): 46–64.

with questionable diplomatic credentials—and the pair soon developed a

relationship that was more than professional, bordering on filial.[4]

The product of their collaboration was a draft constitution for the Karamanlı

Regency, subsequently published under the title *Securities against Misrule, Adapted*

to a Mahommedan State and Prepared with Particular Reference to Tripoli in Barbary.

It is a remarkable and genuinely novel document, the most rigorous expression of

liberal constitutional principles anywhere in the greater Middle East before the

proclamation of Midhat Pasha's Ottoman Basic Law half a century later.[5] Like the

Greek War, this charter of negative rights was born of local adaptations to the

geopolitical turbulence of the preceding years. After the 1815 Vienna Congress

outlawed maritime tribute extraction and protection rackets (Mediterranean piracy

in European diplomatic parlance), Tripoli experienced a protracted, socially

corrosive period of economic stagnation. Yusuf Karamanlı took a more active role in

the trans-Saharan trade to compensate for lost revenues, crushing the independent

Fezzani dynasty of the Awlad Muhammad in the process.[6] When that project

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[4] Coller, "African Liberalism," 543. For insight into British official suspicions aroused by the supposed appointment of D'Ghies to a London diplomatic post see BNA FO 76/16: Hanmer Warrington to Robert Wilmot, Tripoli (1 June 1822).
[5] Jeremy Bentham (ed., Philip Schofield), *Securities against Misrule and Other Constitutional Writings for Tripoli and Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
[6] BNA FO 76/12: Hanmer Warrington to Earl Bathurst, Tripoli (9 October 1818) notes an alarming increase in the volume of slaves passing through Fezzan for sale in Tripoli: "Your Lordship will deeply lament the successful and increasing Traffic of Human Flesh, particularly as that Infernal Trade, not only causes continual Hostility with different Kingdoms in the Interior but prevents a most valuable and Extensive Commercial Intercourse and which can be the only cause likely to obstruct The Research from this Quarter, to the very Heart of Africa." The escalation of the slave trade around this time was made possible in part by Yusuf Pasha's shrewd alliance building in central and western Sudan, particularly his strategic pact with Kanem-

foundered against a wall of rising anti-slavery sentiment, he turned in desperation

to European financiers who gleefully buried Tripoli beneath a mound of

unserviceable debt.[7] By the end of the next decade, the Regency teetered on the

verge of collapse as Yusuf's three sons positioned themselves for a seemingly

inevitable war of succession.[8]

      Hassuna D'Ghies was authentically pious, but distinguished himself from the

liberal and otherwise reformist Muslim cohort that thronged to London around this

time by championing an explicitly African, as opposed to Islamic, progressive

agenda.[9] In Paris he had written a pamphlet—which cited Bentham approvingly and

later gave him entrée to the philosopher's social circle—enjoining European states

Borno. See Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016), 23–26.

[7] The Regency's debt crisis had become so severe by 1823 that Mehmet Ali Pasha (rather audaciously) sent an emissary to Tripoli to propose a cash advance in return for which Yusuf Karamanlı would cede Benghazi, Derna, and Fezzan to Egypt for a period of twelve years. BNA FO 76/17: Hanmer Warrington to Robert Wilmot Horton, Tripoli (16 November 1823). In the event it seems a certain Hajj Mohamed Muckne, longtime advisor to the Karamanlı regime, stepped in with an alternative proposal, for which he was appointed Bey of Benghazi in 1824. BNA FO 76/17: Hanmer Warrington to Robert Wilmot Horton, Tripoli (20 December 1823). Warrington surmised, probably correctly, that this was all an elaborate ruse to prevent any further interference from Cairo.

[8] Ali Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 19–41; L.J. Hume, "Preparations for Civil War in Tripoli in the 1820s: Ali Karamanli, Hassuna D'Ghies, and Jeremy Bentham," *Journal of African History* 21, no. 3 (1980): 311–322.

[9] Hassuna D'Ghies rightly belongs to the same genealogy as Tahtawi, Afghani, 'Abduh, Rashid Rida, and Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi though, to reiterate, his relationship to that tradition is made somewhat oblique by his Africanist leanings. As Coller notes, Africa for D'Ghies was a nebulous imaginative geography—a sedimentary amalgam of classical Mediterranean, Islamic, and trans-Saharan lineages and discourses—not a continental scheme per se. For background on the global Muslim reformist cohort of the first half of the nineteenth century see Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, eds., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

to offer the regimes of the Ottoman Maghreb commercial concessions in return for abolishing the slave trade. If the perverse financial incentive were removed and the regencies were no longer threatened with forced dependency on European capital, he reasoned, urban coastal elites would assume their natural role as enlightened intermediaries and bring the benefits of civilization to the continental interior.[10]

In many respects this counterintuitive pair turned out to be well matched. Bentham, less vocally anti-clerical than most of his contemporaries, was positively ecumenical when presented with the opportunity to apply his ideas in a Muslim majority society. D'Ghies, for his part, offered a critique of both the slave trade and European imperial hypocrisy that broadly resonated with the dominant free market ideology of the time—mercantile, empiricist, and opposed to the arbitrary exercise of power. Communicating in French, often with significant difficulty, they settled on a collaborative project, a "body of law" (*corps de loix*) for Tripoli that would realize D'Ghies' local and regional aspirations while vindicating Bentham's universalizing pretensions.[11]

The text begins with a long prefatory statement on the geography, population, economy, and administration of Tripolitania and Fezzan— D'Ghies' was a great advocate for scientific survey, believing "object geographical advancement" to be a necessary precondition for "progress and improvement"—before enumerating a slate of national and individual "securities" to which the subjects of the new constitutional dispensation would be entitled. These include protection from physical coercion, whether in the form of homicide, banishment, forced

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[10] Coller, "African Liberalism," 543.
[11] Ibid, 545.

disappearance, or indefinite confinement; freedom of religious conscience, political

speech, and the press; insurances against official depredation, personal or

communal, essentially the right to private property; and guarantees covering

individual and collective armed defense. To safeguard against official caprice, the

charter also provides for the creation of representative assembly under "virtually"

universal conditions of suffrage, alongside an array of more localized reforms

(including, predictably, the implementation of the Panopticon model in the Tripoli

prisons, "to derive profit from the labor of prisoners").[12] Such a program would do

far more than insulate the Regency from the danger of civil unrest. The

establishment of a Benthamite constitutional order would stimulate foreign direct

investment, leading to the development of a competitive manufacturing sector,

improved infrastructure (in the form of roads, canals, bridges, and wells), and a

pioneering extractive industry that would enrich the society by exploiting the

mineral wealth hidden under the ground. As Bentham puts it, "These circumstances

taken together would constitute as it were a *pump for capital*: a pump by the force of

which capital would be drawn intro Tripoli from all countries in which it

overflows."[13]

    Bentham and D'Ghies intended for the bulk of the text to be delivered in the

form of a public address by Yusuf Karamanlı himself (in much the same way the

Gülhane Edict, drafted by Ottoman Foreign Minister Mustafa Reşit, was promulgated

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[12] Bentham and Schofield, *Securities against Misrule*, 1–111. For more on Bentham's
place in the history of Ottoman penal reform see Kent Schull, *Prisons in the Late
Ottoman Empire: Microcosms of Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,
2014).
[13] Bentham and Schofield, *Securities against Misrule*, 109–111 (emphasis in original).

by Abdülmecid I in the stately Topkapı Palace gardens fifteen years later).[14] Failing

this, the duo was prepared to initiate a regime change operation to bring

constitutional governance to Tripoli. In spring 1823, D'Ghies began coordinating

with the influential media mogul and economist "Colonel" Robert Torrens to put

such a plan into effect. They plotted to send an expeditionary force of 1,000

irregulars to Malta, from which point they would stage an insurrection on behalf of

Ali Karamanlı with the assistance of the Nafusi Berber tribes (D'Ghies appears to

have been a partisan of Ali, to whom he was related by marriage, and both he and

the communities of Jabal Nafusa eventually backed Ali's claim during the 1832–

1835 civil war).[15] At the height of this conspiracy, Bentham and D'Ghies went so far

as to prepare a series of letters to John Quincy Adams urging the US government to

support the intervention; understandably, in view of their inflammatory content,

they were never dispatched.[16]

Bentham was much better suited to the role of legal theorist than coup

plotter—at any rate he questioned his partner's ability to raise even a fraction of the

necessary funds—and soon got cold feet. Muhammad D'ghies died shortly

thereafter, at which time Hassuna returned despondent to Tripoli to replace him as

foreign minister. Now working within a system he recently plotted to overthrow,

D'Ghies seems to have abandoned the constitutional project altogether, while

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[14] Banu Turnaoğlu, *The Formation of Turkish Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 51.
[15] Hume, "Preparations for Civil War," 317–320; Coller, "African Liberalism," 545–546.
[16] Bentham and Schofield, *Securities against Misrule*, 143–180.

Bentham promptly recycled its text for use in Greece.[17] In the ensuing years, D'Ghies ran afoul of British ambassador Hanmer Warrington, an odious figure who leveraged his diplomatic immunity to exercise despotic proconsular authority from an English country estate in the oasis suburbs outside Tripoli.[18] Fearing for his life, D'Ghies fled to exile in Paris, where he joined forces with the Algerian expatriate community, lobbying the French government to forgo colonization and instead establish an independent state to replace the Istanbul backed Deylik.[19] After the long-anticipated Karamanlı succession war concluded with Mahmud II's surprise reoccupation of Tripoli in 1835, D'Ghies departed for Istanbul, where he served as chief editor for the Tanzimat regime mouthpiece *Takvim-i Vekayi* until his premature death during a plague outbreak the following year. Confronted in his final days with the rank duplicity of European liberal imperialism, he defiantly aligned himself with a multi-ethnic and progressive, if ultimately bureaucratized and autocratic, Ottoman imperial liberalism.[20]

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[17] Ibid, 181–276.

[18] Sara El-Gaddari, "His Majesty's Agents: The British Consul at Tripoli, 1795–1832," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 5 (2015): 770–786; John Wright, "Consul Warrington's English Garden," *Libyan Studies* 35 (2004): 131–140; Coller, "African Liberalism," 547–553. On the global spread of "proconsular despotism" in the heyday of the so-called Second British Empire see C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Pearson, 1989).

[19] For background on this project, which D'Ghies spearheaded alongside his longtime associate Hamdan Khodja, see Jennifer Pitts, "Liberalism and Empire in a Nineteenth-Century Algerian Mirror," *Modern Intellectual History* 6, no.2 (2009): 287–313. On Algeria's location within the Ottoman orbit just prior to the French occupation see Ali Balcı, "Algeria in Declining Ottoman Hierarchy: Why Algiers Remained Loyal to the Falling Patron," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (2020): 1–19.

[20] Ian Coller, "Ottomans on the Move: Hassuna D'Ghies and the 'New Ottomanism' of the 1830s," in Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou, eds., *Mediterranean*

An entrenched discourse within Ottoman historiography frames the early decades of the nineteenth century, undoubtedly a critical inflection point, as the moment when the imperial elite discovered "global Europe" as a "civilizational unity meriting emulation."[21] The peripheral integration of the Empire into the capitalist world economy, attended by European military threats and the rise of ethnic nationalism, provided the impetus for an encompassing, though geographically uneven, process of Ottoman "Westernization."[22] In this light, Ottoman accession to the Concert of Europe as second fiddle after the Crimean War, and the expedited market liberalization that followed, simply formalized a pattern of mimetic reform dating from Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, albeit rooted in deeper histories of connectivity and transcultural exchange.[23] Revisionist scholarship has challenged this narrative by attributing the economic, social, institutional, and legal transformations of the period to internal cultural impulses—Islam and the

Diasporas: Politics and Ideas in the Long 19th Century (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 97–116.

[21] Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (New York: Norton, 1982); Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 15–38.

[22] The liberal idealist and neo-Marxist versions of this narrative align in most important respects. Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987); Şevket Pamuk, *The Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism, 1820–1913: Trade, Investment, and Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[23] Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), to cite a representative example, makes the case for Ottoman Empire inclusion in a European totality without questioning the coherence of that metageographical framing. For a useful critique of the Napoleonic syndrome in modern Middle East history see Dror Ze'evi, "Back to Napoleon? Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19, no. 1 (2004): 73–94.

preservation of Muslim sovereignty move to the foreground—as well as regional

dynamics unique to the Balkans, Arabian Peninsula, and Eastern Mediterranean.[24]

Taken in aggregate, these interventions suggest the "Tanzimat reforms" were in fact

heterogeneous effects produced by profoundly contradictory agendas that need to

be situated within concentric local, regional, and transimperial scales of analysis.[25]

The present chapter builds on these insights in order to examine the

production of Ottoman provincial space in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan

between 1835 and 1876. The interminable wars and rebellions that characterized

this period in the Empire's history have obscured the extent to which commercial, as

opposed to purely geostrategic, imperatives were often paramount.[26] Every actor in

the Eurasian system coveted access to markets in the Ottoman Mediterranean, and

many were alarmed by the rise of provincial governors such as Ali Pasha of

Tepelena and Mehmet Ali Pasha, who threatened to make Istanbul too powerful for

European capital to manipulate (it is important to recall in this context that the

latter remained loyal to the Ottoman dynasty until 1831, fairly late in his illustrious

career).[27] While the most bellicose elements in the North Atlantic world aspired to

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[24] Frederick Anscombe, "Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform," *Past and Present* 208, no. 1 (2010): 159–189; Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt Des Islams* 34, no. 2 (1994): 173–203; Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Ariel Salzmann, *Tocqueville in the Ottoman Empire: Rival Paths to the Modern State* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
[25] Isa Blumi, *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (London: Routledge, 2011) is the most authoritative statement on these methodological issues.
[26] Ibid, 15–47.
[27] Isa Blumi, "Reorientating European Imperialism: How Ottomanism Went Global," *Die Welt Des Islams* 56, no. 3–4 (2016): 290–316. For additional background see Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern*

resolve the "Eastern Question" through military occupation and territorial

dismemberment, an equally influential bloc—represented most prominently by

Lord Palmerston and David Urquhart—sought accommodation with a reinvigorated

Ottoman state as a useful bulwark against Russia and profitable investment

opportunity.[28] This was the context in which a rival, Ottoman imperial project

emerged for Libya, representing the convergent interests of a number of

stakeholders, including the framers of Ottoman constitutionalism and provincial

"modernization" (*tanzimatçılar*), local comprador bourgeois elements, and

transnational finance capital based primarily in "that unparalleled square mile

called the City of London."[29]

It is difficult not to interpret these developments as a delayed realization of

Hassuna D'Ghies' vision for a constitutional Libya. After all, Benthamite

utilitarianism, a "distinctively British concept of progress," shared rather glaring

elective affinities with the burgeoning global financial regime, notably in its

demands for individual liberty and the free circulation of capital pursuant to the

creation of a more productive society.[30] As Ottoman finances became increasingly

interwoven with British interests in the 1840s, Istanbul adopted a package of

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Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), still the classic statement on the "obstreperous viceroy." On Tepedelenli Ali see Katherine Fleming, *The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[28] For background on the Anglo-Ottoman alliance see Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 37–64.

[29] Blumi, "Reorientating European Imperialism," 300–306. For background on global financial networks and their facilitation of colonial development initiatives around this time see Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 730–743.

[30] Mazower, *Greek Revolution*, 249.

constitutional measures, and acceded to a number of commercial concessions, that

Isa Blumi has provocatively described as a precursory form of structural adjustment

(as in the contemporary iteration, a small number of Ottoman subjects reaped

sizeable fortunes in the process).[31] It was at precisely this time that provincial Libya

became an important early testing ground for the new imperial order: through a

developmentalist policy of large scale physical infrastructure improvement and

administrative reorganization, Istanbul sought to fulfill the Benthamite dream of

transforming the region into a "pump for capital" worthy of the name. Functioning

as intended, this system produced clear winners and losers, and indigenous

communities of the provincial interior were hardest hit by far, a pattern repeated in

the ensuing years along the frontiers of Anatolia, Syria, Iraq, and the Hijaz.[32] As I

discuss below, "rebellious tribes"—who have recently received great attention in

the secondary literature as targets of an internal Ottoman colonial discourse—

resisted to this project from the beginning and continued to frustrate Istanbul's

designs into the late 1850s.[33]

The material construction of Ottoman provincial space in Libya had an

important ideological corollary. Necdet Sakaoğlu's widely cited historical dictionary

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[31] Blumi, "Reorientating European Imperialism," 300–302.

[32] Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 84–122.

[33] Most famously in Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–342; Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–796. For an important critique along the same lines suggested here see Mostafa Minawi, "Beyond Rhetoric: Reassessing Bedouin-Ottoman Relations along the Route of the Hijaz Telegraph Line at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 1–2 (2015): 75–104.

of the Tanzimat defines "Ottoman Africa" (*Afrika-i Osmani*) all too briefly as a "name

given to Egypt and Libya in the second half of the nineteenth century" (*19 yy. ikinci

yarısında sonra Mısır ve Libya'ya verilen ad*). His use of the passive voice is

instructive, begging the question, who added this term to the lexicon of imperial

politics, and under what circumstances?[34] In the decades after the Ottoman

restoration, as the newly formed imperial liberal cartel pushed deeper into the

Sahara, the ruling elite in Istanbul experienced an epiphany, claiming for itself the

mantle of an "African" power. This marked a noteworthy shift in Ottoman

geographical thinking, which had conceived of the Libyan provinces as constituent

parts of the so-called "Western Garrisons" (*Garp Ocakları*), along with Algeria and

Tunisia, since the sixteenth century conquest [35] The "age of reform" so often

characterized as a period of European gnosis (the "discovery of Europe," leading

inexorably to "Ottoman Westernization") can therefore just as plausibly be

described as a moment of Afrogenesis.[36] As I argue below, this discursive

construction of Ottoman Africa was a crucial, though largely overlooked, part of the

"continentalization" process described by figures such as V.Y. Mudimbe and Ali A.

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[34] Necdet Sakaoğlu, *Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Tarih Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), 7. The special status of Khedival Egypt is the subject of a vast historiography. I address it in this chapter only insofar as the trajectory of the Ali Pasha Dynasty intersects with developments in Ottoman Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. For a recent revisionist take see Adam Mestyan, *Arab Patriotism: The Ideology and Culture of Power in Late Ottoman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[35] Seydi Toprak, "Osmanlı Yönetiminde Kuzey Afrika: Garp Ocakları," *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 22, no. 1 (2012): 223–237.

[36] In Mudimbe's thought, "Afrogenesis" signifies the "epistemological locus of Africa's invention and its meaning for discourses on Africa." V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 29–36.

Mazrui, and had significant ramifications for Ottoman foreign policy into the

twentieth century.[37]

<u>Dispossession, Accumulation, and Popular Revolt: The Agony of Provincialization</u>

A shroud of imperial intrigue enveloped Tripoli in the years leading up to the

succession crisis. In March 1830, eighteen months before the Ali Pashas invaded

Syria and mere weeks ahead of the fall of Algiers, the British Consulate received an

intelligence communique from Livorno relaying French intentions to conquer all

three regencies with Egyptian and Russian assistance.[38] Though Yusuf Karamanlı

ordered fresh stores of arms and ammunition from England in preparation for an

imminent attack—these were promptly supplied by gun manufacturer and war

profiteer Henry Tatham with Warrington's facilitation—the tripartite conspiracy

pitting the "Gigantic Force of France" against the "Tripoline Dwarf" never

materialized.[39] Instead, the French dispatched naval forces to the region and

demanded the Pasha settle his extensive debts. After his quick capitulation, and

much garment rending over the "insult to the British flag" thereby implied, London

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[37] Ali A. Mazrui, "The Re-Invention of Africa: Edward Said, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Beyond," *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 3 (2005): 68–82.
[38] BNA FO 76/27: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (8 March 1830); BNA FO 76/27: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (10 March 1830).
[39] BNA FO 76/27: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (1 August 1830). For more background on this so-called "Drovetti Plan" (named after the French consul who engineered the plot) see Ozan Ozavcı, *Dangerous Gifts: Imperialism, Security, and Civil Wars in the Levant, 1798–1864* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 146–157.

sent the HMS Windsor Castle to Tripoli in October to demand equally favorable

repayment terms for British creditors.[40]

Widespread insurrection and revolt engulfed the region by the following

summer, with a 50,000 strong tribal confederation loyal to Sheikj 'Abd al-Jalil of the

Awlad Suleiman threatening secession from the bankrupt government that was

taxing them into the ground to offset its deficits (he defeated the Karamanlı army in

January 1832 and formed a short-lived sultanate in Fezzan with the support of

Kanem-Borno, Egypt, and France).[41] Warrington, who was busy expanding the

consular enterprise to Derna and Murzuk, never forgave Yusuf Pasha for kowtowing

to Paris, and gradually came to regard his administration as an impediment to

British commercial expansion in the interior.[42] After 100 escaped hostages and

several members of the Karamanlı Praetorian Guard sought protection in its

consular office in February 1832, Britain withdrew any lingering support from the

regime. Yusuf quickly abdicated, and Warrington, acting on his own initiative, threw

his weight behind the Pasha's grandson, Muhammad Karamanlı.[43]

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[40] BNA FO 76/27: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (10 August 1830); BNA FO 76/27: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (13 August 1830); BNA FO 76/28: Hanmer Warrington to Vice Admiral Sir Pulteney Malcolm, Tripoli (3 October 1830)

[41] BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (26 May 1831); BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to Viscount Goderich, Tripoli (4 August 1831); BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (23 December 1831); BNA FO 76/31: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (28 January 1832). On Sheikh al-Jalil's alliances see Ahmida, *Modern Libya*, 54.

[42] BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (20 September 1831); BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (7 November 1831).

[43] BNA FO 76/31: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (24 February 1832); BNA FO 76/32: Hanmer Warrington to Viscount Goderich, Tripoli (6 August 1832); BNA FO 76/32: Hanmer Warrington to Viscount Goderich, Tripoli (23 August 1832).

What began as a dynastic dispute then quickly devolved into a regional proxy war. Heir apparent Ali Karamanlı, who Bentham and D'Ghies had championed a decade earlier, enjoyed the support of Tripoli's religious elites, Janissary-descended notables (*kuloğlu*), and administrative incumbents, as well as the tribes of Jabal al-Gharb, including the aforementioned Nafusi Berbers, under the leadership of Sheikh Ghuma bin Khalifa.[44] A skilled diplomat and the more experienced claimant by far, Ali quickly secured recognition from Naples, Spain, the Netherlands, and France (this last and most important patron, like its British counterpart, adopted a policy of official neutrality). The putsch coalition that meanwhile gathered around Warrington's estate represented the urban nouveau riche—primarily non-Muslim merchants and financiers with foreign connections—as well as a handful of disaffected former Karamanlı bureaucrats. They conspired to install the young and pliant Muhammad, and to force upon him a system of constitutional monarchy that, ironically, closely resembled the Bentham-D'Ghies proposal gone by. Unsurprisingly, their alliance with Sheikh al-Jalil and the Awlad Suleiman was a marriage of strategic convenience that constantly threatened to unravel.[45]

Hostilities raged in Tripoli and its surrounding rural areas for three years. Though Warrington's party made several desperate bids to bring a conclusive end to the fighting—smuggling heavy artillery into the region through Malta (which Ali's forces promptly stole) and appealing to London to intervene directly—these efforts

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[44] On the social background of the North African *kuloğlu* see Tal Shuval, "The Ottoman Algerian Elite and Its Ideology," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 3 (2000): 323–344.

[45] Kolawole Folayan, "Tripoli during the Reign of Yusuf Pasha Qaramanli," PhD Thesis (London: University of London, 1970), 270–318.

amounted to little. The British government rejected proposals to establish a colony

in Tripoli, and so the stalemate dragged on. When new rumors began to circulate

that Mehmet Ali or the Tunisian Husainids planned to intervene in the endgame,

Mahmud II assigned an envoy from Istanbul to mediate between the opposing

Karamanlı camps. These negotiations continued throughout 1834, while Ali's naval

forces relentlessly bombarded Warrington's oasis compound. Ultimately the

diplomatic track failed to produce a resolution. Partisans of Ali and Muhammad

rejected the Ottoman ambassador's eminently reasonable arbitration, each believing

they had a world to win. Finally, at the end of May 1835, Istanbul sent a twenty-

vessel fleet to Tripoli with Mustafa Necib Pasha at the helm. After occupying key

strategic positions inside the city and detaining Ali onboard one of the ships,

Mustafa Necib established a permanent residence in the provincial capital's ancient

fortress and declared he would henceforth govern directly in the name of the

Ottoman Sultan.[46]

Mahmud II's spectacular and unexpected intervention definitively crushed

both of the Karamanlı aspirants, but their respective tribal allies refused to make

peace with the new regime. Resistance to Mustafa Necib's administration began

immediately, and a second deployment of troops was required to put down an

uprising in Misrata by a certain Osman Edgem and other elements loyal to Sheikh al-

Jalil in 1836.[47] Jabal al-Gharb meanwhile became ground zero for opposition to the

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[46] Ibid.
[47] BOA HAT 283/16907 (1836). In the early days of the reoccupation, a British correspondent observed: "The Porte, far from finding, as she had been led to imagine, this African possession a new source of revenue, and a position from which she might assert her rights over the rest of the Barbary States, has, thanks to the

Ottoman restoration, and forces loyal to Sheikh Ghuma managed to block Istanbul

from entering the region until 1841. Despite the unwavering and rather scandalous

patronage he received from Warrington, Ottoman forces captured and executed

Sheikh al-Jalil in 1842.[48] Ghuma bin Khalifa briefly surrendered around this time—

Istanbul extended him official recognition at the rank of *kapıcıbaşı* and an annual

stipend of 2,500 *kuruş* for his cooperation—but antagonisms resumed in short

order, continuing until the Sheikh was banished to Trabzon on the Black Sea.[49]

As rural discontent mounted, Ottoman forces set about establishing the

traditional architecture of imperial authority in this provincial outback. The

experience of Ghadamis, an important commercial hub just across the border from

French Algeria, offers an illustrative case in point. In 1846, the regime constructed a

kasır (a modest fortress or mansion built to accommodate government functionaries

in the frontier bureaucracy) in the center of town, which was then undergoing

annexation to the Jabal al-Gharb District Governorate (*Cebel-i Garbi Sancağı*). The

ostentatious *tuğra* (Ottoman calligraphic seal) displayed on its gates was

undoubtedly intended as warning to French merchants and caravans, who

frequented the area en route to Ghat and western Sudan, as well as the local

nomadic population that routinely harassed the city's residents.[50]

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egregious incapacity of her generals, met at Tripoli with a fresh drain to her treasury and army." See "Turkish," *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, 2 January 1839. Osman Edgem ('Uthman al-Adgham) eventually reconciled with Istanbul, brining the conflict in northern Tripolitania's second city to a close.
[48] Wright, "English Garden," 137.
[49] Nedim İpek, "Osmanlı'da Sürgün: Trabzon Örneği," *Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi* 13, no. 26 (2019): 363–386.
[50] BOA A M 2/19 (1845); BOA İ MVL 78/1526 (1846).

The tribute extraction mechanism constructed by the Ottoman regime as it pushed southward did more to enflame than mollify the countryside. English abolitionist James Richardson, who used Ghadamis as the base for his excursion into the Tuareg dominated regions of Fezzan in 1845, became friendly with its district governor, Rais Mustafa. Though he expressed admiration for this "enlightened functionary"—a veteran of the campaign against Mehmet Ali in the Eastern Mediterranean who served under the famous Austrian General August Giacomo Jochmus—he complained bitterly to Warrington about the extortionate levies Tripoli was imposing on local inhabitants (with refreshing candor he told the Consul, "The Ghadamsee people have a catalogue of grievances, which they wish me to present to you; but if I interfere, the Bashaw [Pasha] will get my head taken off").[51]

Rais Mustafa had managed, rather incredibly, to hold the region for several years with fewer than sixty "Arab" troops at his disposal. He accomplished this feat by brutally disarming and dispossessing the mountain tribes who, Richardson claimed, had been reduced to abject squalor. Ahmed Pasha, the commanding officer charged with quelling popular resistance in the hinterland, simultaneously imposed a massive indemnity of 50,000 *zer-i mahbub* (gold coins in circulation regionally since the eighteenth century, equivalent at the time to 10,000 pounds sterling) on the Ghadamasi merchant class for their collusion with the insurgents, ransacking homes and stripping women of their jewelry to make up the full amount.[52] After the

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[51] James Richardson, *Reports on the Commerce of Northern Africa (Confidential)* (London: No Publisher Identified, 1846), 7–8.
[52] Ibid, 28.

city's residents sent a number of impassioned petitions to the new sultan, Abdülmecid I, their annual contribution was fixed at 6,250 *zer-i mahbub*, septuple the amount they had customarily paid to the Karamanlı regents; though this figure was halved after three years, locals were already bled dry, and refused to pay "except at the edge of a sword."[53]

Depleted of liquidity, Ghadamasi merchants turned in desperation to Tripoli based financiers with foreign backers and extraterritorial privileges—the Labi and Silva families, both pillars of the Sephardic community, stepped in prominently here—who supplied them with cash advances that they promptly reinvested in the Kanem-Borno slave trade. When Richardson beseeched Warrington to halt this illicit traffic, the Consul instead aired the explorer's objections to the public, jeopardizing his life as he was preparing to depart for Ghat across the principal slave routes.[54] In light of these indiscretions, and Warrington's seemingly omnipresent role in every regional scandal across his three-decade career, it is reasonable to imagine he profited personally from the enterprise, probably in the form of kickbacks.[55]

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[53] Ibid, 28–29. For additional background on the *zer-i mahbub* see Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[54] James Richardson, *Travels in the Great Desert of Sahara in the Years of 1845 and 1846, Volume 1* (London: Harrison and Company, 1848), 350–357.

[55] Such activities bring to the fore an apparent contradiction between the laissez faire, evangelical-abolitionist ideology of British colonialism on one hand and the complicity of ground-level functionaries in the perpetuation of the slave trade on the other. As Alison Frank notes, "The very structures that made international trade generally safe and profitable [c. 1840–1870] facilitated the continuation of slaving across the Mediterranean long after the project of abolition began—no matter the intentions of any number of lawmakers, diplomats, mercantile capitalists, or ships' captains." See Alison Frank, "The Children of the Desert and the Laws of the Sea: Austria, Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and the Mediterranean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (2012): 410–444.

The Ghadamasi merchant gentry went to extraordinary lengths to avoid their

tax obligations, either by concealing their fortunes or, in the most extreme cases,

abandoning the city altogether. Opportunities for embezzlement were undoubtedly

ample, and the entire region experienced acute population decline in this period as a

result. Nevertheless, as Richardson confessed to Warrington in September 1845,

official levies served a real purpose: despite elite protests that Ghadamis' wealth

was being confiscated to fatten Ottoman civil officials in Tripoli, the government

earmarked the majority of the funds it collected in these ham-fisted raids for the

pacification and occupation of Fezzan.[56] By the same token, the Grand Vizier and

War Minister decided the hereditary nobility of the urban centers should participate

more actively in the Ottomanization project. Beginning in 1847, Istanbul

conscripted members of the *kuloğlu* class to serve in a special division (*kıt'a*) of the

reorganized imperial army (*Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediyye*) for the express

purpose of suppressing tribal rebellions in the countryside.[57]

Unlike the Empire's other rural and agrarian frontiers, where social protest

movements arose in the middle of the nineteenth century in dialogue with Istanbul,

aiming to vernacularize and radicalize its initiatives, Saharan Tripolitania and

Fezzan rejected them outright, declaring an unequivocal preference for local

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[56] Richardson, *Commerce*, 8–9.
[57] BOA HR SYS 1530/23 (December 1847). Mandatory military service for
Tripolitanian *kuloğlu* became official policy with the issuance of an imperial decree
(*irade-i seniyye*) in 1847. For background on the transformation of the Ottoman
armed forces during the later reign of Mahmud II see Cemal Kafadar, "Janissaries
and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels without a Cause?" *International
Journal of Turkish Studies* 13, no.1 (2007): 113–134.

autonomy.[58] Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, conditions vacillated between tribal

compliance and open insurrection, and the leaders of major revolts were banished

to Cyprus, Crete, and Rhodes. Difficulties became especially acute when Ottoman

regular forces left the region for service on other fronts—including a series of

uprisings in the Balkans in the 1840s and the more existentially threatening

Crimean War—opening additional space for political opposition to thrive.[59] This

process reached its climax in 1855 when Sheikh Ghuma escaped Black Sea exile, fled

across Anatolia, and returned to Jabal al-Gharb by way of Malta and the Tunisian

port town of Sfax.[60]

 After this daring getaway, Sheikh Ghuma immediately resumed his war on

the Ottoman interlopers. Under his leadership, a reinvigorated insurgency spread

from the western mountains to the whole of Tripolitania, with major clashes

breaking out in Yafran, Ghayran, and a handful of coastal enclaves adjacent to the

provincial capital.[61] A series of humiliating Ottoman troop defections soon followed,

and Ghuma's rebellion alarmed foreign observers when it pushed into the oases

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[58] M. Talha Çiçek, *Negotiating Empire in the Middle East: Ottomans and Arab Nomads in the Modern Era, 1840–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Yonca Köksal, *The Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat Era: Provincial Perspectives from Ankara to Edirne* (London: Routledge, 2019); E. Attıla Aytekın, "Peasant Protest in the Late Ottoman Empire: Moral Economy, Revolt, and the Tanzimat Reforms," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 2 (2012): 191–227; Milen V. Petrov, "Everyday Forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864–1868," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 4 (2004): 730–759.
[59] Cemal Atabaş, "Trablusgarb Eyaleti'nde Merkezi İdarenin Tesisi Ve Şeyh Guma İsyanı (1835–1858)" (PhD Thesis, Istanbul: Istanbul University, 2017), 271–277. Atabaş has constructed an impressively comprehensive, almost day-by-day account of local resistance to Ottoman provincialization, covering a mass of detail impossible to summarize here.
[60] Ibid, 278–280.
[61] Ibid, 285–290. For a British account see BNA FO 161/16, especially the entry for 15 July 1855.

outside Tripoli and threatened to overrun the city itself.[62] When irregular

reinforcements from Albania and Khedival Egypt finally arrived, the Sheikh

decamped to the Tunisian-Algerian borderlands, where he established a makeshift

base and lobbied the French to support an ill-fated Karamanlı restoration plot.[63] The

campaign to dislodge him from the area inflicted astronomical costs on frontier

communities, who were terribly abused by the inexperienced, poorly disciplined

mercenaries Istanbul dispatched to restore order. As a result of these depredations,

Ghuma's rural support base had already eroded considerably when he was captured

and killed during a *kuloğlu* raid outside Ghadamis in the March 1858.[64] His

execution, and the nearly simultaneous formation of a plan to annex Ghat, the

southernmost outpost in the country, marked the end of organized armed resistance

to Ottoman provincialization.[65]

In the tumultuous decades following Yusuf Pasha's abdication, the Union Jack

tailed the Ottoman Army's *Ayyıldız* wherever it went in Tripolitania and Fezzan,

inevitably and conspicuously to be hoisted above any contested terrain seized by

imperial forces. Like most British actions in Ottoman Libya in the first half of the

nineteenth century, this marking of diplomatic territory was Warrington's personal

handiwork. Despite his reckless support for Sheikh al-Jalil, which destroyed his

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[62] Ibid, 290–295.
[63] Ibid, 308–348.
[64] Ibid, 424–428.
[65] For internal discussion over the long and difficult process of bringing Ghat into the imperial fold see BOA A MKT MVL 47/65 (1851); BOA İ DH 300/18969 (1853); BOA A MKT UM 352/73 (1858). For Istanbul's dealings with local Fezzani elites see BOA İ MMS 15/625 (1858). On the administrative reorganization of Ghadamis and its incorporation into the Jabal al-Gharb/Cebel-i Garbi sub-district governorate after Sheikh Ghuma's death see BOA İ MVL 476/21546 (1862).

reputation and nearly cost him his position at the height of the succession crisis, the

Consul developed a strong identification with the Ottoman provincial

administration after 1835.[66] Since the late eighteenth century, London's

"bridgehead" in Tripoli had served as a vital communications link along the

overland route to Asia, as well as a staging ground for lucrative commercial

exploitation of the central and western Sudan.[67] During the waning days of the

Regency, the latter factor became primary. As early as the 1820s, Warrington had

fixated on establishing a vice-consulate in Murzuk.[68] He continued to pursue it

through the turmoil of the 1830s and finally succeeded around 1840, just as the first

phase of the Tripolitanian insurgency was coming to an end. Within five years,

additional offices opened in Benghazi, Ghadamis, and Derna under the supervision

of Frederick Warrington, who inherited his father's post in 1842.[69] Diplomatic

correspondence in and out of Tripoli spells out the objectives of this policy

explicitly: setting aside Britain's geostrategic interests and anti-slavery sentiments,

the southward drive was motivated above all by a desire for greater access to the

markets and resources of Kanem-Borno.[70]

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[66] C. R. Pennell, "A Killing in Tripoli (1843): Principle and Contingency and Personal Diplomacy," *Libyan Studies* 36 (2005): 59–77.
[67] El-Gaddari, "His Majesty's Agents."
[68] BNA FO 76/15: Hanmer Warrington to Earl Bathurst, Tripoli (16 July 1821).
[69] BOA İ HR 7/345 (1840); BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (7 November 1831); BNA FO 160/11, Charles Dickson to G. W. Crowe, Ghadamis (7 May 1849).
[70] BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to R.W. Hay, Tripoli (7 November 1831).

Reconstruction in an Ottoman Pilot Province

The Ottoman imperial project for Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan was an integral part of the sweeping geopolitical and macroeconomic realignments of the 1830s. By that time, Istanbul's client-turned-nemesis Mehmet Ali Pasha had emerged as a systemic threat to the hegemony of European finance capital by putting forward an alternative development model based on state monopolies and an embryonic form of important substitution industrialization.[71] After European powers intervened to block his army's advance through the Levant and southern Anatolia, the Ottoman government consented to a number of free trade deals that dramatically reduced its ability to tax foreign imports and collect extraordinary levies during wartime, most notably the 1838 Treaty of Baltalimanı.[72] Britain used similar bilateral agreements to remove trade barriers and expand the privileges of foreign merchants across the Global South in the middle of the nineteenth century—in China, India, and West Africa—and the precise ratio of reformist zeal to external coercion that persuaded Istanbul to open its doors to international capital remains a

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[71] Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 19. Issawi's classic text explicitly compares the Mehmet Ali Pasha development model to Soviet experiments in the 1930s and the so-called peripheral Keynesianism adopted widely across the Global South after the Second World War. The relative success or failure of these policies in early-nineteenth-century Egypt remains a contested point. For a recent revisionist assessment based on previously unexamined economic data (which answers its title question in the affirmative) see Laura Panza and Jeffrey Williamson, "Did Muhammad Ali Foster Industrialization in Early Nineteenth-Century Egypt?" *Economic History Review* 68, no. 1 (2015): 79–100.

[72] Şevket Pamuk, *Uneven Centuries: Economic Development of Turkey since 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 90–111.

subject of debate.[73] Whatever the causes, lending to the Sublime Porte and foreign direct investment in the Empire's physical infrastructure increased dramatically in the following years—the real bonanza began after the Crimean War and lasted until the 1873 Great Depression—making Ottoman reconstruction a profitable enterprise for both the City of London and local intermediaries.[74]

To appreciate the process fully, it is useful to consider the transregional commercial picture that began to coalesce in light of these arrangements. The political economy of the nineteenth-century Sahara has become virtually synonymous with the northbound trade from the Sahelian interior to the urban Mediterranean, above all in enslaved people. This partial and distorted view, which results from an overreliance on British abolitionist sources, belies a more complicated ground-level picture. Tripolitania and Fezzan alone were geographical hubs of at least three distinct commodity chains. While it is true that these regions were vital terminals of caravan traffic in ivory, gold, and salable human beings, they also produced essential goods for export to Western Europe and the Levant, as well as raw materials that supplied key manufacturing sectors in the industrial north (chiefly olive oil, potassium carbonate required to make soap and glass, red dye

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[73] Giampaolo Conte, "Defining Financial Reforms in the 19th-Century Capitalist World-Economy: The Ottoman Case (1838–1914)," *Capital and Class* (2021): 1–26; Reşat Kasaba, "Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 215–241; Peter Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688–1850," *Economic History Review* 39, no. 4 (1986): 501–525.
[74] Edhem Eldem, "Ottoman Financial Integration with Europe: Foreign Loans, the Ottoman Bank and the Ottoman Public Debt," *European Review* 13, no. 3 (2005): 431–445; Pamuk, *Ottoman Empire and European Capitalism,* 55–81.

containing *rubia tinctorum*, and esparto grass, which was used to create a type of

high-quality paper prized by book and newspaper printers).[75]

While vast fortunes were built on these and a number of other Saharan

commodities—from saffron threads and tanned hides to salt bricks and packed

dates—perhaps no item better epitomizes the shifting mercantile geography of the

period than the "Barbary" ostrich feather, which experienced a major boom near the

height of Anglo-Ottoman financial integration in the 1870s.[76] Ostrich plumes had a

long history of traditional use in the Sahara and Sahel, and were traded profitably

throughout Afro-Eurasia from the early modern period. In the second half of the

nineteenth century, luxury hats and gowns ornately adorned with the long, elegant

feathers became fashionable markers of wealth and status in Europe and North

America. Spurred by rising demand, British capital moved to corner the emerging

market, and London overtook Livorno as the undisputed center of the trade in the

late 1850s just as Istanbul was tying up the loose ends of rebellion in southern

Tripolitania and Fezzan.[77]

Ottoman officials actively encouraged and facilitated these developments.

When the long-heralded occupation and annexation of Ghat finally came in 1875, it

was largely to protect a vital artery of the feather trade from French encroachment.

At the same time, the state incentivized merchants to use the Kano-Tripoli route,

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[75] Mark Dyer, "Export Production in Western Libya, 1750–1793," *African Economic History* 13 (1984): 117–136.

[76] E. Ann McDougall, "Salt, Saharans, and the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: Nineteenth-Century Developments," *Slavery and Abolition* 13, no. 1 (1992): 61–88.

[77] Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Ulrich Haarmann, "The Dead Ostrich: Life and Trade in Ghadames (Libya) in the Nineteenth Century," *Die Welt Des Islams* 38, no. 1 (1998): 9–94.

which passed through Ghat and Ghadamis, instead of the east-west and trans-

Atlantic alternatives, a policy that helped to forestall the total eclipse of the Sahara

for another generation. As a result of these efforts, Tripoli quickly became the

primary Mediterranean point of export for Saharan and Sahelian plumes. As Sarah

Abrevaya Stein has shown, Jewish commercial networks spanning three continents

were vertically integrated at every stage of this exchange, from the financing of

caravan voyages to the handling and processing of feathers in Tripoli. This Judeo-

Ottoman economic partnership, which remained stable until the early twentieth

century, was celebrated in Istanbul's Ladino popular press as a community

triumph.[78]

Windfall profits generated by the British financed, Ottoman backed, and

Jewish dominated feather industry—exports alone netted hundreds of thousands of

pounds sterling annually in the last quarter of the century—shed considerable light

on the internal logic of Libyan provincialization. The influence of the vice-consulates

in Ghadamis and Murzuk waned throughout the 1850s until both offices were

shuttered in 1861. Quinine and steamboats enabled British penetration of the

interior from the Gold Coast, leading many economic historians to conclude London

quit the region in the second half of the nineteenth century for the simple reason

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[78] Stein, *Plumes*, 84–111. Ostrich plumes fell out of fashion in the decade before the First World War, in part because the Audobon Society successfully convinced the North Atlantic public that feather consumption was unethical. For background on Anglo-French competition in the feather sector at the turn of the century, as well as the dramatic social and ecological consequences of the trade for Saharan and Sahelian communities, see Aomar Boum and Michael Bonine, "The Elegant Plume: Ostrich Feathers, African Commercial Networks, and European Capitalism," *Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 5–26.

that the Saharan routes had become obsolete.[79] Ottoman efforts around this time to

prevent France from diverting northbound commercial traffic (including the slave

trade) through Algeria, bypassing Fezzan, suggest a more complex reality.[80] In fact,

Saharan commerce continued to thrive until the decade before the First World War,

albeit under a different dispensation, as finance assumed the vanguard role

previously occupied by merchant capital and its missionary-explorer foot soldiers

(local intermediaries, meanwhile, often exploited inter-imperial rivalries to secure

more favorable terms for themselves).[81] The Reform Edict of 1856 (*Islahat Fermanı*)

created a legal framework for foreign direct investment in the Ottoman domains,

and European lenders injected over 75 million pounds into the imperial economy

over the next five decades. These funds overwhelmingly went toward ambitious

civil works projects—the Ottoman railway system is the best-known and most

capital-intensive example—which the Sublime Porte granted to European firms as

commercial concessions. The dense concentration of foreign investment in rail,

telegraphs, ports, and other public utilities, to the exclusion of Ottoman industry and

agriculture, suggests the primary goal was to facilitate trade and open the Empire to

the world economy; support for domestic production was, at best, a secondary

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[79] Dyer, "Export Production," 118; Albert Adu Boahen, *Britain, the Sahara, and the Western Sudan, 1788–1861* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964). On quinine, steamboats, and European penetration of the African interior see Daniel Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
[80] B. G. Martin, "Five Letters from the Tripoli Archives," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 3 (1962): 364. For a more general refutation of the narrative of Saharan economic decline see Anthony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa, 2nd Edition* (London: Routledge, 2020).
[81] BOA HR MKT 377/39 (1860).

consideration.[82] Against a backdrop of perpetual administrative reorganization (Fig.

1), Ottoman Libya emerged as a pilot province for this new economic order. Over

the next twenty years, its three regions became ground zero for the sort of grand

infrastructure build ups subsequently undertaken across the Empire, with the

objective of transforming them, again per Bentham's metaphor, into a "pump for

capital."[83]

Given the nature of this enterprise, the Ottoman government unsurprisingly

focused its debt-financed development ventures on the ports of Tripolitania and

Cyrenaica, where dilapidated harbors and poor sanitation protocol created endless

difficulties for local and foreign commercial agents.[84] Three of the four principle

caravan routes in the second half of the nineteenth century—originating in Kanem-

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[82] Pamuk, *Uneven Centuries*, 112–133. In practice this process was often convoluted, as factions within the Sublime Porte competed with one another and European creditors to secure more favorable terms. See e.g. Soli Shahvar, "Concession Hunting in the Age of Reform: British Companies and the Search for Government Guarantees; Telegraph Concessions through Ottoman Territories, 1855–58," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 4 (2002): 169–193.

[83] For example, Istanbul appointed a certain Aziz Pasha, formerly of the Cypriot provincial administration, as the new *mutasarrıf* of Benghazi after it was reincorporated into to Tripolitania, following a year as a standalone *vilayet*, in 1872. BOA HR SYS 1530/29 (1872). On similar administrative reshuffling in the west and south see BOA MVL 778/16 (1864). For a timeline of the revolving door governorships of this period see Ettore Rossi, "Per la storia della penetrazione turca nell'interno della Libia e per la questione dei suoi confine," *Oriente Moderno* 9, no. 4 (1929): 153–167.

[84] Ottomanists and other historians of the Global South have long recognized port cities as "privileged locales of contact with the world capitalist economy…[which] captured and reflected in concrete form the entire episode of incorporation." Çağlar Keyder, Y. Eyüp Özveren, and Donald Quataert, "Port-Cities in the Ottoman Empire: Some Theoretical and Historical Perspectives," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 16, no. 4 (1993): 519–558. For revisionist perspectives from the standpoint of cultural history and historical sociology respectively see Malte Fuhrmann, *Port Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean: Urban Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Cem Emrence, *Remapping the Ottoman Middle East: Modernity, Imperial Bureaucracy, and Islam* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015).

Borno, Timbuktu, and Kano—passed through Murzuk and Ghadamis before reaching their final destination in Tripoli. The fourth, supplied by Wadai in central Sudan, passed through the oasis settlements of the eastern Sahara before hitting the Mediterranean at Benghazi and Derna (the Sanusi Order, subject of chapter 3, eventually dominated this corridor).[85] The entrepôts of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica could therefore function either as conduits or chokepoints, depending on their rational and efficient management. The state of disrepair in which the Empire inherited them from the Karamanlı regime throttled the commercial potential of the province and hindered strategic communication between Istanbul and the frontier.
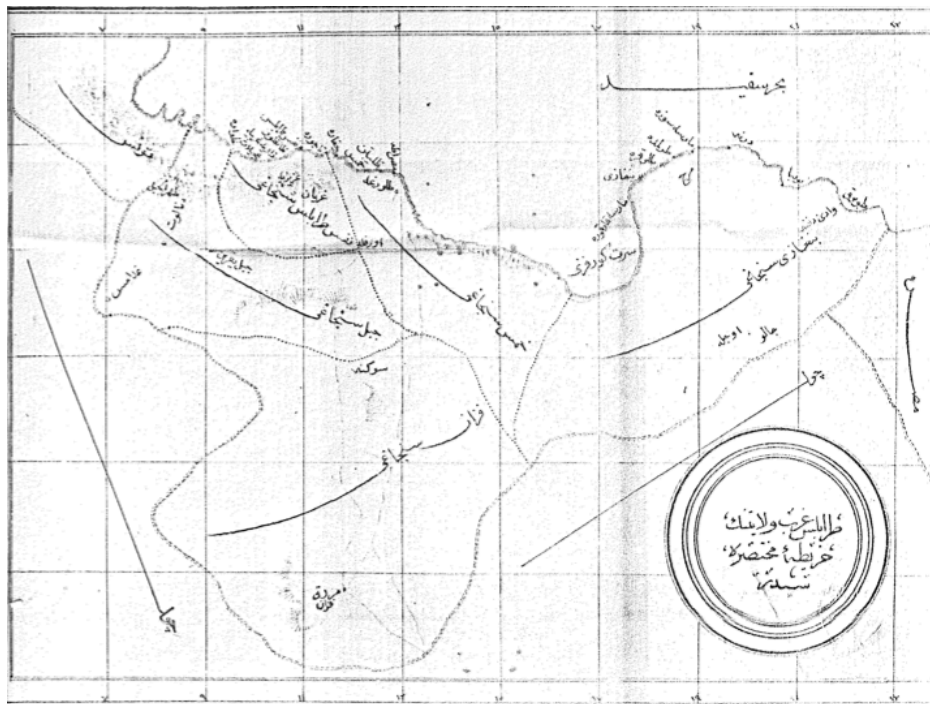
Figure 1: *Trablusgarb Vilayeti Salnamesi* (1869), a map showing the five administrative subdivisions (*sancaks*) of Ottoman Libya: *Trablus*, *Cebel-i Garbiye*, *El-Hums*, *Bingazi*, and *Fizan.*

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[85] Paul Lovejoy, "Commercial Sectors in the Economy of the Nineteenth-Century Central Sudan: The Trans-Saharan Trade and the Desert-Side Salt Trade," *African Economic History* 13 (1984): 85–116.

British capital infusions and the successful pacification campaigns of the mid 1850s accelerated the transformation of the region's built environment. Several renovation projects broke ground in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica over the next decade, initially focusing on their municipal harbors, many of which had become hazardous on top of inefficient, and were too small to accommodate increasing export traffic.[86] The basic utilities of the urban centers, especially their sewers and water wells, also needed immediate attention.[87] Tripoli and Benghazi had long been notorious cholera hot spots, a problem Warrington tried to address in cooperation with his French counterparts in 1831 by establishing a public health committee to maintain sanitary cordons during outbreaks and oversee regular disinfections.[88] The Ottomans also made limited progress on this front, building a new quarantine station (*tahaffuzhane*) in Tripoli in 1849 and dispatching medical officials from Istanbul to preside over similar improvements in Benghazi in 1866.[89] Despite these efforts, cholera still appeared intermittently, with serious outbreaks occurring in Tripoli in 1855 and Benghazi in 1859.[90] As I discuss in chapter 4, infectious disease continued to influence the production of territorial Libya into the twentieth century, creating major difficulties for the Italian military during the first phase of colonization in 1911.

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[86] BOA BEO AYN 915/ 9 (1866); BOA İ MMS 38/1567 (1869).

[87] BOA BEO AYN 914/20 (1869).

[88] BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to Viscount Goderich, Tripoli (30 September 1831); BNA FO 76/29: Hanmer Warrington to Viscount Goderich, Tripoli (6 December 1831). For additional background see Alex Chase-Levenson, *The Yellow Flag: Quarantine and the British Mediterranean World, 1780–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[89] BOA C SH 497 (1849); BOA BEO AYN 915/8 (1866).

[90] For the Tripoli outbreak see BNA FO 161/16, entry for 19 September 1855. For Benghazi see Chase-Levenson, *Yellow Flag*, 272.

Recognizing that even the humbler ports of easternmost Marmarica would become important to global trade after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Ottoman government sponsored additional renovation projects in Tobruk and Bumba near the Egyptian frontier.[91] Emanating out from the harbors, Ottoman developmental initiatives also tried to establish stronger, more dependable connections north to Istanbul and south into the interior. Unreliable telegraph infrastructure hampered communication between provincial Libya and the Sublime Porte into the 1870s. Submarine lines running from Tripoli and Benghazi to Istanbul through Malta were notoriously poor, and state officials were eager to develop an alternative by extending the Tripoli line overland to Alexandria. They were less enthusiastic about footing the bill (estimated at nearly 200,000 francs), and ultimately sought foreign backing for the project.[92] Facing the desert, the provincial administration responded to an increase in the volume of trade flowing toward Benghazi from Wadai by constructing a central marketplace adjacent to the port district to support the southern caravans.[93]

State-sponsored development in rural Tripolitania and Fezzan mirrored these broad trends, though the process was more fundamentally violent. The 1858 Land Code was promulgated nearly eight weeks to the day after Ghuma bin Khalifa's decapitated head reached the governor's office in Tripoli, and its pernicious effects

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[91] BOA İ MMS 37/1512 (1869); BOA BEO AYN 915/44 (1869); BOA BEO AYN 916/28 (1876).
[92] BOA BEO AYN 915/38 (1868). The Sublime Porte established a postal steam line between Istanbul and Benghazi in 1874 in part to address this longstanding problem. See BOA BEO AYN 916/20 (1874).
[93] BOA BEO AYN 915/23 (1867).

were immediately felt throughout the tribal areas south of the provincial capital.[94]

Forced sedentarization was one of the primary strategies imperial forces used to subdue the uprisings of the 1840s and 1850s, and the transformation of the land regime intensified the unfinished work of indigenous dispossession.[95] Designed to undercut landowning notable households, the Code also upset the balance of tribal and nomadic life across the Empire by replacing communal property with the normative principle of individual ownership.[96] Accordingly, the provincial administration divided tribal lands, parceled them out to private buyers, and promoted commercialized sericulture, olive farming, and esparto cultivation.[97] These agricultural goods were especially vulnerable to unpredictable weather and climate extremes and consequently attracted little foreign investment compared to the Saharan trade. Such natural environmental pressures also help to explain why plantation estates never developed in Ottoman Tripolitania and Fezzan, as they did in many of the Empire's other agrarian regions. The extermination and expulsion of much of the tribal leadership during the pacification campaigns of the 1840s and 1850s was undoubtedly an important factor as well. Rural communities generally refused to comply with Istanbul's land registration drives, fearing that tax collectors

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[94] Atabaş, "Trablusgarb," 426.

[95] Lisa Anderson, *The State and Social Transformation in Tunisia and Libya, 1830–1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 108–109.

[96] Kasaba, *Moveable Empire*, 103. For a recent "anti-statist" critique of the historiography of the 1858 Code see E. Attıla Aytekın, "Agrarian Relations, Property, and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 6 (2009): 935–951

[97] BOA C İKTS 1327 (1850); BOA İ DH 255/15713 (1852); BOA İ MVL 532/23853 (1865); BOA AYN 915/155 (1875).

and military recruiters would follow the paper trail to their doors.[98] Export

commodities thus remained the province's most important source of wealth and the

primary target of both imperial and foreign investment into the early twentieth

century, a trend exemplified by the city of Aziziye, 40 kilometers south of Tripoli: to

promote commerce from western Sudan to the Mediterranean, Ottoman authorities

built this new settlement (officially a juridical sub-district or *kaza*) on lands

traditionally held in common by the Warshafana tribe, naming it after Sultan

Abdülaziz.[99]

Ottoman Afrogenesis and Its Discontents

The territorial and commercial dimensions of Libyan provincialization were

accompanied by an equally consequential, if less immediately perceptible Ottoman

soft power offensive to the south. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

Istanbul had construct a bridgehead of its own to the interior, establishing a

political, cultural, and diplomatic presence across the continent. Historians have

recently come to appreciate the extent and significance of these relationships, which

grew deeper and more numerous until the First World War severed them

prematurely. Revisionist scholarship justifiably cites the Ottoman mission to the

Cape of Good Hope in 1862 as an important milestone along this road. In an effort to

improve relations with Britain, Sultan Abdülaziz dispatched a prominent Baghdadi

Kurdish *alim*, Ebubekir Effendi, to South Africa, where he was assigned to adjudicate

Javanese Muslim community disputes. Though the move came at the British

[98] Anderson, *State and Social Transformation*, 108–109.
[99] BOA BEO AYN 915/3 (1866).

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government's request, the attaché may have exceeded his mandate. As Ottoman influence grew, London began to worry that the sultan was exploiting his caliphal authority to build a "spiritual colony" in the region (the construction of Ottoman consulates and schools throughout the Cape suggests these concerns were not entirely baseless). In addition to their local effects, these activities broadened the imperial elite's geographical horizons: Ömer Lütfi, one of Ebubekir Effendi's disciples, spent four years in the field giving religious instruction to local Muslims, and the travelogue he published after returning to Istanbul, *Umitburnu Seyahatnamesi*, acquainted the Ottoman reading public with the region for the first time.[100]

A similar dynamic took shape less than a decade later in East Africa, as far south as Kenya and Tanzania. Beginning in the 1870s, Qadiriyya and 'Alawiyya Sufis trained in Istanbul and based in the Ottoman Hijaz established settlements around the hinterland of the Swahili coast, where they proselytized to the indigenous population and attempted to expand southern Arabian (especially Hadramawti) commercial influence in the interior. These missionary outposts reconfigured the demographic makeup of the region, as large numbers of people flocked to the areas north and west of Lake Tanganyika to avail themselves of the economic opportunities on offer in exchange for conversion. Isa Blumi describes this flowering of East African vernacular Islam under Istanbul's aegis as a "preemptive strike"

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[100] Marloes Cornelissen Aydemir, "South Africa: An Ottoman Colony?" *International Review of Turkish Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 64–84; Mustafa Serdar Palabıyık, "Ottoman Travelers' Perceptions of Africa in the Late Ottoman Empire (1860–1922): A Discussion of Civilization, Colonialism, and Race," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 46 (2012): 187–212.

against European imperialism, and credits Sufi missionaries with nurturing an equation of the Ottoman state with anticolonial resistance throughout the southwest Indian Ocean zone.[101]

Abdülhamid II's adoption of pan-Islam as a pillar of state policy and the Empire's participation in African Scramble in the 1880s and 1890s, both of which I investigate in subsequent chapters, arguably marked the apotheosis of this process. Yet the Ottoman bid for a walk-on part in the great power drama of continental partition, like the fanciful and self-aggrandizing conceit of "Ottoman Africa," had economic, political, cultural roots that stretched back nearly half a century. Surviving fragments of the vibrant diplomatic correspondence between Ottoman officials in Tripoli and their counterparts in the Kanemi capital of Kukawa demonstrate that Istanbul began cultivating geopolitical alliances in western Sudan just after the restoration, at precisely the moment when Warrington was establishing his consular toehold in Murzuk. One early indication of this can be found in an 1846 exchange between Muhammad Amin, Tripoli governor from 1842 until 1846, and his son Hassan, who served *kaymakam* of Fezzan into the mid 1850s. Though relations between Tripoli and its southern neighbors had soured in the final years of the Regency due to opportunistic Karamanlı slave raiding, the situation improved so dramatically after the Ottoman takeover that Bornu's leader, 'Umar ibn

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[101] Blumi, "Reorientating European Imperialism," 307–313. For additional background see Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860–1925* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, felt comfortable using informal channels to request emergency arms from the "Pasha" to repel an invasion from Wadai.[102]

Muhammad Amin was reluctant to involve his office in these intrigues, fearing such a weapon shipment would fall until the hands of the only recently pacified Awlad Suleiman. Nine years later, in a letter to his father's successor, Mustafa Nuri, Hassan refers to 'Umar of Bornu as *hakim* ("ruler," but also "governor"), suggesting a degree of fealty to Istanbul, however equivocal ('Umar, for his part, signed a letter dispatched from Kukawa to Tripoli with the eyebrow-raising *mutawalli* [*mütevelli*] or "*waqf* trustee," another synonym for provincial governor, perhaps indicating his self-understanding as an Ottoman client or sub-contractor).[103] With rival coups dividing Bornu's ruling elite around this time—against the backdrop of more frequent British, French, and German expeditions to the region—Hassan foreshadowed the Hamidian pan-Islamic turn by invoking the Ottoman sultan's caliphal prerogative and Muslim unity as bases for reconciliation.[104]

In the final analysis, these relationships were determined by financial calculations. Ottoman civil officials wanted to ameliorate dangerous travel conditions between Kukawa and Tripoli, and needed Bornu's cooperation to protect caravan traffic from relentless Tubu and Tuareg raids. Despite two decades of

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[102] Martin, "Five Letters," 354–359.
[103] Ibid, 362.
[104] Ibid, 365. The origins, extent, and influence of the politics of Muslim unity during the Hamidian years remain subjects of controversy within the Ottoman field. See Aydın, *Muslim World*; Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

pacification campaigns and the general calm that prevailed in western Libya after 1858, banditry remained a serious issue. The problem became so severe by the early 1870s that an Ottoman emissary to Bornu was robbed in Fezzan on his way back to the provincial capital, losing slaves, ivory, ostriches, and a host of exotic animals destined for the Dolmabahçe Palace menagerie. Tribal unrest along the southern frontier, and the losses inflicted on Ottoman and European commercial interests as a result, may go some way toward explaining why the Saharan Tripolitania-Fezzan region became a veritable penal colony for Unionist dissidents in the Hamidian years, the subject of the following chapter.[105]

When Kenyan intellectual Ali Mazrui famously and provocatively argued "it took European conceptualization and cartography to turn Africa into a continent," he was recapitulating a critique that had already become conventional wisdom in the world of critical geography: Africa is a human invention whose boundaries and cultural significations are historically constituted, protean, and contradictory.[106] As Mazrui notes, the pioneering, equally controversial American anthropologist Melville Herskovits made the same observation as early as 1960, characterizing Africa as a discursive production, coherent only to the degree that "the map is invested with an authority imposed on it by the mapmaker."[107] Thus, in Mazrui's view, the genealogy of African continentalization unfolds through five distinct phases: early contact between the northern littoral and Mediterranean Europe;

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[105] Blumi, "Reorientating European Imperialism," 366–372.

[106] Mazrui, "Re-invention of Africa." Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[107] Ibid, citing Melville Herskovits, "Does Africa Exist?" in Herskovits, ed., *Symposium on Africa* (Wellesley: Wellesley College, 1960).

later, more sustained interactions between indigenous peoples of the interior and

the empires of classical antiquity; the advent and expansion of Islam, resulting in the

"Sudanization" of the sub-Saharan zone and an awakening to Black consciousness;

European colonization and the articulation of a "triple heritage" comprised of

indigeneity, Christianity, and Islam; and the paradigm of Afrocentricity, which finally

"globalizes Africa itself."[108]

The imaginative geography expressed by the term *Afrika-i Osmani* belongs to

the same lineage of extrinsic frameworks for knowing and representing Africa and

Africanity. Formally indistinguishable as a linguistic construction from *Afrique

équatoriale française*, *Deutsch-Westafrika*, or *Africa Orientale Italiana*, it betrays an

essentially imperial view of the world. Hassuna D'Ghies, the Tripolitanian notable

and provocateur whose extraordinary story opened this chapter, conspired with

forces larger than himself in a doomed bid to refashion the Karamanlı satellite

regime as a constitutional state in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. An early

proponent of "African liberalism," D'Ghies aspired to establish Tripoli as a strategic

base for the progressive transformation of the continental interior, and here he

undoubtedly failed. His mentor and collaborator Jeremy Bentham had more modest

ambitions, proposing a charter of negative rights—"securities against misrule," in

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[108] Mazrui, "Re-invention of Africa." The debate over Afrogenesis—and "Africanism" as a discursive phenomenon akin to Orientalism—dominated Europhone Africana studies in the 1980s and 1990s and remains an important issue in the field today. In addition to the works already cited by Mazrui and Mudimbe see *inter alia* Robin Derricourt, *Inventing Africa: History, Archaeology and Ideas* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011); Michael Eze, *The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa* (New York: Palgrave, 2010); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Andrew Apter, "'Que Faire?' Reconsidering Inventions of Africa," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 1 (1992): 87–104.

his words—to stimulate foreign direct investment and lay the foundations for an economic revival across the region. The Ottoman regime to which D'Ghies dedicated his final years in exile arguably succeeded on the latter front, albeit at an immense cost to the local population.

Backed by international finance capital, Istanbul undertook a wide-ranging reconstruction project in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan in the middle of the nineteenth century. Motivated as much by commercial as geostrategic calculation, the restoration government pursued various development schemes—bureaucratic rationalization, physical infrastructure build-ups, land privatization—with the intention of opening the region to the world economy. Provincial officials, foreign lenders, and local entrepreneurs with extraterritorial privileges were the main beneficiaries of this process, a trend exemplified by the ostrich boom of the 1870s. Meanwhile, social forces on the receiving end of Libyan provincialization— especially the tribal and nomadic populations of Tripolitania and Fezzan, disarmed, dispossessed, and subjected to a mercilessly standardized form of tribute extraction—resisted Istanbul militarily for twenty years, and continued to obstruct its designs long after they were nominally pacified. The additional rhetorical abuse and scorn heaped upon them by the Ottoman elite—which frequently described rural provincial and mobile subjects as "uncivilized" and "savage"—must be understood in view of this larger reality.[109]

The intertwining of economic rationality and *realpolitik* created the conditions for (and in fact necessitated) an unprecedented degree of Ottoman

[109] Deringil, "Nomadism and Savagery."

involvement in the affairs of the Sahara and Sudan, as indicated by the close relationship between Kanem-Bornu and the Libyan provincial administration in the 1850s. Istanbul, like London, viewed Tripoli as a strategically critical gateway to the interior, and gradually expanded its influence across the continent, from Cape Town to the Swahili coast, in the decades leading up to partition. The invention of Ottoman Africa was a component piece of a much larger imperial project, representing the convergent interest of transnational capital, local entrepreneurs, and the so-called "Tanzimat men" who took majority control over Ottoman policymaking during the waning years of Mahmud II's reign. Paradoxically, their bid for African ascendance seems to have provided refuge, under the banner of Ottoman Islam, to peoples besieged by increasingly rapacious European colonial empires as the century drew to a close, a subject to which I return in the following chapters.[110]

Conclusion

Libya's transformation into an Ottoman pilot province—a multifaceted process encompassing administrative reorganization, externally financed developmental initiatives, market liberalization, and a campaign of rural dispossession akin to primitive accumulation—was largely complete by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as a qualitatively different regime took power in Istanbul. The Hamidian years thus represented a turning point at which the social and economic trends of the previous four decades collided with new geopolitical realities. The suppression of the slave trade after 1877 and consequent decline of

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[110] Palabıyık, "Perceptions of Africa."

the Saharan routes exacerbated tensions created by the forced sedentarization of the nomadic population and commercialization of agriculture in the 1850s.[111] These policies redrew the demographic map of the region, driving peasantization, widespread flight to the cities, and the gradual formation of an urban working class, especially in Tripoli.[112] Resistance to similar dynamics in other frontier regions—the Karak Revolt in Transjordan for example—did not emerge full force until the early twentieth century, again suggesting that "Ottoman Africa," particularly Tripolitania and Fezzan, provided the template for an empire-wide program of reconstruction.[113]

The draconian treatment of tribal and nomadic populations on display in mid-century Libya continued in other corners of the Ottoman world—witnessed by the forced deportation and settlement of Mosul's Hemvend Kurds in rural Cyrenaica in the 1890s, which I discuss in the next chapter—but was attenuated by Istanbul's need to build stable alliances with formidable partners in strategically vulnerable areas. As the winds of great power politics began to shift, the embattled Hamidian regime had to balance deteriorating relations with Britain, increasing French competition in the Sahara, rising Italian ambition in the Red Sea Basin, and the omnipresent threat of Russia. As several recent studies have argued, the unique pressures of this period forced the "immovable state" to pursue accommodation

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[111] Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression: 1840–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
[112] Ahmida, *Modern Libya*, 57–71.
[113] Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

with tribal power.[114] The Ottoman government's partnership with the Sanusi Order of Cyrenaica, which blossomed around the turn of the century and survived the Unionist seizure of power in 1908, offers a prime illustration of this phenomenon, and is the subject of chapters 3 and 4.

The advent of Hamidian "despotism" also marked a watershed moment for Ottoman contentious politics, as the locus of dissent moved from the countryside to the imperial capital, especially its modernist schools and bureaucratic institutions. When the regime began sentencing large numbers of constitutionalist, nationalist, and otherwise revolutionary dissidents to lifetime exile in Tripolitania and Fezzan in the 1890s, provincial Libya became a critical, if unlikely, theater for the most dramatic internal struggles of the era. The construction of this Saharan penal colony, and its far-reaching consequences for Ottoman politics and the region's inhabitants during the Second Constitutional and Italian colonial periods, are the issues to which I now turn.

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[114] Kasaba, *Moveable Empire.*

II.

***ŞEREF KURBANLARI*: ISTANBUL UNIONISTS AND THE PENAL COLONY AT**

HAMIDIAN LIBYA

Introduction

In late December 1894, Reverend Z.T. Sweeney of Indiana traveled to

Washington to submit a petition intended for Sultan Abdülhamid II to Secretary of

State Walter Gresham. The clergyman had served as the previous administration's

consul general in Istanbul, and his Ottoman counterparts held him in such high

esteem that he was awarded the prestigious Order of Osmaniye during his tenure

and even represented the Ottoman government at the Chicago World's Fair.[1] With a

network of influential contacts in both capitals, he believed he could get the message

through to Yıldız Palace. Though Sweeney had retired from public life, he reluctantly

agreed to intercede on behalf of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, whose

300,000 members hoped to obtain an imperial pardon for a jailed Armenian named

Sahag Mahdissian. A native of Sivas, Mahdissian's case had become a cause célèbre

in US Protestant missionary circles.[2]

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[1] For background on honorary medals as tokens of Ottoman soft power at the turn of the century see Faiz Ahmed, "Meddling with Medals, Defending the Dead: Late Ottoman Soft Power from South Asia to North America," *International History Review* 43, no. 5 (2021): 1041–1059. On the Ottomans at the Columbian Exposition see Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

[2] "They Want an Armenian Released: American Women Petition the Sultan of Turkey," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 December 1894; "Gross Wrong: An American Citizen Thrown into Prison," *Los Angeles Times* 21 December 1894; Robert Reeves, "A Biography of Z.T. Sweeney" (MA Thesis, Butler University, 1959), 71–77. The American citizen mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times* headline was another Ottoman Armenian, "Dickran Terseian" [Dikran Terzian], an intriguing figure in his own right

The six Anatolian provinces (*vilayet-i sitte*) where the majority of Ottoman

Armenians resided—Sivas, Erzurum, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbekir, and Mamüretülaziz—

experienced a series of pogroms targeting Armenian and Assyrian communities

from 1894 to 1897, grisly massacres that earned Abdülhamid the epithet "Red

Sultan" and elicited scathing rebukes from the European great powers.[3] With a

campaign of ethnic violence prompting mass conversion to Islam about to rock the

countryside, Sahag Mahdissian appears to have been a victim of circumstance and

poor timing. Sources differ over precise details, but concur on the essential outlines

of his case: Mahdissian was a former consular employee who took a position at a

rural school operated by American missionaries near his hometown. Sometime

prior to his internment, one of his pupils approached him with a fragment of

Armenian text and asked him to write out a Turkish translation. The student then

took this handwritten text, a biblical passage heralding the messianic kingdom, to

the local marketplace, where he displayed it ostentatiously on his shirt. Evidently

this scandalized local residents, and provincial security forces quickly arrested

Mahdissian and the student, both of whom were convicted of conspiring against the

Ottoman government. After a hasty trial they each received lifetime exile (*sürgün*)

sentences to Murzuk, the oasis capital of Fezzan Governorate, a severe penalty

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(for additional background see Vahé Tachjian's work on Ottoman Harput for the House Hamadyan Project).

[3] On Anatolian Armenians during the this period see Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Nadir Özbek, "The Politics of Taxation and the 'Armenian Question' during the Late Ottoman Empire, 1876–1908," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 770–797; David Gutman, "Armenian Migration to North America, State Power, and Local Politics in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 1 (2014): 176–190.

usually reserved for treason or sedition. Press reports suggest the student died of exposure or injuries he sustained during the grueling overland journey from Tripoli. Mahdissian survived, but soon lost contact with the outside world.[4]

The Mahdissian affair was mostly exceptional for the media and diplomatic attention it garnered abroad. Many Ottoman Armenians were exiled to the Saharan frontiers of the Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: in fact, the practice was so commonplace that Khoren Ashekian, Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, pleaded with Abdülhamid, on the "occasion of the *padişah's* noble birthday" in 1891, to absolve a group of parishioners deported to Libya as a token of royal benevolence.[5] Banishment of individuals perceived as existential threats to the regime became routine during the Hamidian years, affecting every strata of Ottoman society: Armenians and other "national minorities," members of clandestine opposition groups, tribal "bandits" contesting imperial authority along geostrategically sensitive frontiers. Among other exile sites such as Rhodes, İşkodra, and Afyonkarahisar, the Tripolitanian hinterland and deserts of Fezzan stood out for their apparent remoteness, demographic scarcity, and harsh environment. These

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[4] BOA Y PRK ASK 154/58 (1900) attests that circa 1900 Yıldız Palace did consider pardoning Armenian subjects exiled to Libya after an "incident" in Sivas, but the document does not mention Sahag Mahdissian by name. On American missionary activity in the late Ottoman Empire see Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millenialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

[5] BOA Y MTV 49/40. See BOA Y PRK BŞK 18/6 on another group of Armenian and Rum subjects and their exile to Fezzan a year prior. For background on Ashekian see Varak Ketsemanian, "The Hunchakian Revolutionary Party and the Assassination Attempts against Patriach Khoren Ashekian and Maksudzade Simon Bey in 1894," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no.4 (2018): 735–755.

qualities prompted observers within and beyond the Empire to imagine Hamidian

Libya as a "Saharan Siberia," the mention of which was "sufficient to cause a

shudder at Constantinople." As a former US government attaché wrote in the

Washington Post in 1899, "Whenever a prominent citizen or dignitary suddenly

vanishes…it almost invariably becomes known sooner or later that he has been

shipped off by night to Tripoli," thereafter to be taken through the Sahara to

Murzuk, a harrowing journey often tantamount to a death sentence.[6] Cami Bey

(Abdülkadir Cami Baykut), a Unionist dissident exiled to Fezzan as a mid-level civil

administrator in the late 1890s, confirms this impression, lamenting that "for a long

time Trablus [Ottoman Libya] has carried for our Istanbulis a meaning as horrible as

the terrible and dark dungeons in the noblemen's old castles…during the

Inquisition."[7] The oppressive climate and horizonless landscape, coupled with the

arbitrary predations of prison guards, similarly moved Kosovo-born anarchist Pavel

Shatev to describe southwestern Libya as a scene of "physical and psychological

torture only the few can survive."[8]

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[6] "The Sultan's Siberia." *Washington Post*, 30 April 1899.

[7] Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, "Orientalism 'Alla Turca': Late Nineteenth/ Early Twentieth Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim 'Outback,'" *Die Welt Des Islams* 40, no. 2 (2000): 139–195.

[8] Aleksandar Shopov, "'Fezzan Is the Siberia of Africa': Desert and Society in the Prison Memoir of Pavel Shatev (1882–1951), an Anarchist from Ottoman Macedonia," *Global Environment* 12 (2019): 237–253. Conditions of internment were appalling throughout the Empire in the nineteenth century. Poor sanitation, overcrowding, and official abuses of power were perennial issues for the Ottoman administration, leading to frequent inmate escapes, an issue I discuss in greater detail below. See Kent Schull, *Prisons in the Late Ottoman Empire: Microcosms of Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 111–141 and the editors' prefatory essay in Laleh Khalili and Jillian Schwedler, eds., *Policing and Prisons in the Middle East: Formations of Coercion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Janet Klein's recent study of the Hamidian Light Cavalry Regiments, Abdülhamid's local enforcers in Ottoman Armenia, begins with an astute sociological question: "under what circumstances does a state empower a group that it would ultimately prefer to suppress, and when does this actually serve to undermine the state's very intentions to establish authority?"[9] This chapter considers a different frontier, on the other side of the Empire, but follows a similar line of inquiry, asking: why did the Hamidian regime deputize, at a geographical remove, dissident forces it may ultimately have preferred to neutralize outright? What combination of domestic and geopolitical considerations brought this seemingly conflicted policy into effect? What were its unintended consequences? And how did these developments shape the process of territorial spatialization in late Ottoman Libya?

The thirty-year reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1908) was famously paradoxical, at once representing an authoritarian rejection of Young Ottoman liberalism and a belated fulfillment of Tanzimat modernism. His sultanate began amid an existential crisis, and downward pressures exerted by European competitors over the ensuing years deepened existing problems of fiscal solvency, political demography, and elite legitimacy. The policy response crafted from Yıldız Palace—which Nader Sohrabi describes as a "neo-patrimonial" synthesis of bureaucratic rationality and personal rule—sought to realize the previous generation's material ambitions while breaking free of the "Tanzimat cultural straightjacket." It is therefore unsurprising that the Hamidian regime blended

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[9] Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 2.

progressive developmentalism, based on the groundwork laid in the 1850s and 1860s, with a full-spectrum tightening of social control.**10** On the positive side of the ledger, the education sector made impressive strides in these years, a social transformation that also impacted the Empire's carceral geography: Abdülhamid personally oversaw a massive expansion of preparatory schooling, founded the University of Istanbul, and built a prestigious tribal academy (*Aşiret Mektebi*) to initiate the sons of rural notables into the governing elite. He also dedicated enormous resources to professional training for young officers, engineers, medical doctors, and civil servants, white-collar administrators entrusted to revitalize Ottoman institutions.[11] At the same time, against the backdrop of a domestic political culture that practically encouraged seditious conspiracies, the sultan consolidated decision-making authority around his personal office and the Palace Secretariat (*Mabeyn-i Hümayun Başkitabeti*). This system, which promoted education as the key to professional success and imperial longevity but nevertheless rewarded loyalty over competence, always threatened to buckle under the weight of its own contradictions. Thus the mushrooming coercive apparatus liberal critics cited as evidence of Hamidian despotism (*istibdad*)—emergency powers, spy networks, specious denunciations, the centralization and rationalization of the

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[10] Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 52; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).
[11] Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Eugene Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II's School for Tribes (1892–1907)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996): 83–107; Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

prison administration, the rapid expansion of penal exile—was a logical response to profound structural constraints.[12]

The Hamidian regime deported legions of Ottoman subjects to the Saharan frontier around the turn of the century, a motley assemblage whose collective presence made provincial Libya an unlikely microcosm of late imperial contentious politics. Following in the footsteps of two such groups—a rebellious Kurdish tribe from Mosul and an Istanbul-based cohort of CUP activists—this chapter argues that the construction of this uniquely Ottoman penal colony reflected the convergence of a number of economic, strategic, legal-diplomatic, and domestic political trends. The geopolitics of the Eastern Question and Scramble for Africa brought renewed urgency to the holdover nomadic question during the crisis years around the turn of the century. In this context, the Libyan Desert became a warehouse for mobile populations unable to reconcile with what Reşat Kasaba calls the "immovable state" (as the next chapter illustrates, however, these mobile groups could also be a major strategic asset, a means of projecting Ottoman power into places that were logistically impossible to govern directly).[13] Additional considerations shaped the handling of high-profile Unionist dissidents exiled to Tripolitania and Fezzan during the same period. Rather than squander his investment, the eminently practical sultan had them sentenced to mid-level civil service posts, a novel continuation of the previous regime's commercial, infrastructural, and administrative

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[12] On the concept of despotism in late Ottoman intellectual and political history see Banu Turnaoğlu, "Despotism (İstibdad) in Ottoman Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 41, no. 1 (2020): 16–42.
[13] Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

reconstruction efforts. The nearly simultaneous transfer of an Iraqi Kurdish tribe to inner Cyrenaica and placement of Unionist coup plotters in the provincial bureaucracy of western Libya both point to the same conclusion: the remotest Ottoman frontiers, ostensibly marginal and out of view, were very often at the center of the most pressing political questions facing the Empire. The legal-diplomatic exigencies of territorial spatialization along insecure frontiers—an empire-wide process that began in the Libyan pilot province in the 1840s—intersected in vexing and often unexpected ways with domestic upheavals of the 1880s and 1890s, creating demand for a new kind of Ottoman carceral geography. Provincial Libya increasingly fulfilled this need in the late Hamidian years, as the imperial center reimagined the region as a penal colony with unique Ottoman characteristics.

Crossroads of Domestic Geopolitical Crisis: Social Origins of the Hamidian *Sürgün*

Though punitive exile had an extensive classical lineage in the Ottoman Empire, the practice underwent multiple qualitative transformations over the imperial longue durée. In the early Ottoman centuries, *sürgün* was primarily a means for the expanding state to settle newly annexed regions by transplanting sedentary and nomadic populations alike. While this often constituted a form of collective punishment against rebellious subjects, the early Ottomans also promoted mass migration with tax exemptions and land grants. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this generally entailed resettling Muslim peasants in the Christian majority Balkans and transferring military-age Balkan Christians to Anatolia, where

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they would pose less of a threat. The dynasty also incentivized refugees and forcibly

displaced communities from abroad—likewise conceptualized as *sürgün*

populations—to migrate to Istanbul, which Mehmed II repopulated with Greeks,

Iberian Jews, and Armenians after capturing the city in 1453.[14]

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ancient regime used

banishment and the closely associated sentence of citadel internment (*kalebend*) to

punish moral offenses like procuring and prostitution. Local courts frequently

compelled individuals convicted of sexual impropriety to relocate outside their

neighborhoods and cities, though escape and recidivism were common. The legal

system responded to more serious infractions, such as cases of corruption among

high-ranking *ulema* and civil officials, with more draconian forms of exile, often

imposing detention sentences on islands. Expulsion to Cyprus and other small

islands in the Mediterranean, cut off from major population centers and notorious

for their extreme, malarial climates, anticipated the reworking of the *sürgün* during

the Hamidian era.[15]

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[14] Ibid*,* 18; Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 128–130; Abdullah Acehan, "Osmanlı Devleti'nin Sürgün Politikası ve Sürgün Yerleri," *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 1, no.5 (2008): 12–29; editor's prefatory essay in A.C.S. Peacock, ed., *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Another major absorption of foreign exiles occurred in the wake of the Crimean War, when the Ottoman Emigrant Commission resettled Circassian refugees across Anatolia. See David Cuthel, "The Circassian Sürgün," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003): 139–168.

[15] Fariba Zarinebaf, *Crime and Punishment in Istanbul: 1700–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 168–169; Elyse Semerdjian, *"Off the Straight Path": Illicit Sex, Law, and Community in Ottoman Aleppo* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 94–137; Jane Hathaway, *Beshir Agha: Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Imperial Harem* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2012), 39–44.

1876 marked a critical inflection point, inaugurating an era of protracted social, economic, military, and diplomatic woes that undermined elite legitimacy at home and damaged Istanbul's geostrategic and legal position internationally. The official reaction to these threats consisted of several interlocking strategies: infrastructure buildups more ambitious than anything attempted over the previous half century, administrative standardization and rationalization, and a multifaceted ideological offensive Selim Deringil has evocatively described as the "fine-tuning" of the Ottoman subject. Under Abdülhamid, the ideological state apparatus penetrated deeper into the lives of ordinary people than ever before, applying precise measures of intimidation, enticement, propaganda, and force to sculpt loyal subjects from the raw material of the Ottoman population. The transformation and expansion of the *sürgün* in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was thus an integral part of an aggressive reconstruction agenda.[16]

When Abdülhamid ascended to the throne after the deposition and mysterious death of his uncle, he inherited an empire reeling from the effects of a global depression and besieged on multiple fronts by competitors determined to interfere in its political, financial, and communal affairs.[17] Though progressive forces in the Empire had initially hoped for a blossoming of civil society under the

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[16] Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*. On the structure of the Ottoman bureaucracy under Abdülhamid and division of administrative labor between Yıldız Palace and the Sublime Porte see Carter Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 221–290.

[17] Avi Rubin, *Ottoman Rule of Law and the Modern Political Trial: The Yıldız Case* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2018); Şevket Pamuk, "The Ottoman Empire in the 'Great Depression' of 1873–1896," *Journal of Economic History* 44, no. 1 (1984): 107–118.

new administration, that possibility evaporated when the imperial Russian fleet approached the mouth of capital at the climax of the 1877–1878 Russian-Ottoman War. In the wake of the Ottoman defeat, Abdülhamid suspended the constitution indefinitely, prorogued the General Assembly, made painful concessions in the Balkans, and confronted an influx of Muslim refugees fleeing persecution in the Caucasus. Though Britain intervened at the Congress of Berlin in summer 1878 to restructure the disastrous Treaty of San Stefano on terms more favorable to Istanbul, this proved to be a Faustian bargain: London annexed Cyprus as compensation for its diplomatic support and consented to a Hapsburg occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. By 1882, Britain went on to colonize Egypt and Sudan, while a coalition of European creditors established a hyper-predatory debt commission to oversee the bankrupt Empire's fiscal administration.[18]

Ironically, the only provision of the 1876 constitution meaningfully preserved following its abrogation was article 113, which outlined the government's rights and duties under the *idare-i örfiye*. This legal paradigm, an Ottoman-Islamic reworking of the "state of siege" or "emergency rule," enabled the sultan to govern by martial law until his deposition. Crucially, article 113 also includes an explicit clause on banishment, enumerating the prerogatives of the sovereign: his majesty the sultan has the exclusive right of "expelling from the well-protected domains (*memalik-i mahrusa-i şaheneden ihraç ve teb'id etmek*) those who, in consequence of trustworthy information obtained by the police, are recognized as dangerous to the

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[18] Murat Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Zafer Toprak, "Proto-Globalization and Economic Change in the Late Ottoman Empire: A Commentary," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 35 (2006): 129–134.

safety of the state." The permanent state of emergency and Abdülhamid's frequent

recourse to his deportation powers were among the defining features of Ottoman

criminal justice in the years leading up to 1908. However, it is crucial to note that,

contrary to the language of article 113, the regime sentenced opponents to *internal*

displacement much more often than banishment outside the Empire in practice.[19]

Conditions stabilized at the top after the intense crisis of the late 1870s and

early 1880s, but the final years of the nineteenth century still witnessed endemic

social insecurity and unrest, affecting every arena of Ottoman life. Acute labor

shortages battered the countryside, precipitated by urbanization and demographic

hemorrhaging to the Americas. Weapons smuggling and low-grade insurgency were

rampant in the Balkans, Yemeni interior, and Druze Mountains of southern Syria.

Having gained a strategic foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean, Britain gradually

replaced Istanbul as the dominant power in the Persian Gulf as well. Officially

sanctioned massacres burned through the national and religious minority

communities of Anatolia, giving way to cycles of retributive violence that made the

Empire an international pariah. As the Mahdissian case illustrates, daily reports of

sectarian violence reached as far as the American Midwest.[20]

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[19] Noémi Lévy-Aksu, "An Ottoman Variation on the State of Siege: The Invention of the İdare-i Örfiyye during the First Constitutional Period," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 55 (2016): 5–28; Gökhan Bacık and Bülent Aras, "Exile: A Keyword in Understanding Turkish Politics," *Muslim World* 92, no. 3–4 (2002): 387–406. For additional background on the Ottoman constitution see Aylin Koçunyan, "The Transcultural Dimension of the Ottoman Constitution," in Pascal Firges, et al., eds., *Well-Connected Domains: Towards an Entangled Ottoman History* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 235–258.
[20] Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878–1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, "Tools of Revolution: Global Military Surplus, Arms Dealers, and Smugglers in the Late Ottoman Balkans, 1878–

At the same time, the Empire also began to experience periodic outbursts of labor agitation at its ports, tobacco warehouses, and coalfields.[21] The uneven incorporation of the Ottoman provinces into the capitalist world market accelerated the growth of socialist currents, especially in the urban centers of the Levant. Predictably, given that Abdülhamid's reign coincided with the heyday of global anarchism, spectacular acts of violence such as bank takeovers and targeted executions became regular occurrences by the 1890s. "Çerkez" Mehmed Reşid Şahingiray, a founding member of the CUP who makes another appearance below, even contemplated hiring a gang of "bloodthirsty anarchists" to murder the "great despotic Satan" in 1896. These trends culminated with a bombing attempt at Yıldız Palace in July 1905, a reprisal attack staged by Armenian revolutionaries in conjunction with an eccentric Belgian anarchist that the sultan narrowly survived.[22]

1908," *Past and Present* 237, no. 1 (2017): 167–195; Thomas Kühn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference: Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849–1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009); Frederick Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[21] Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822–1920* (New York: Berghahn, 2006); Can Nacar, *Labor and Power in the Late Ottoman Empire: Tobacco Workers, Managers, and the State, 1872–1912* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

[22] Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Hans-Lukas Kieser, "From 'Patriotism' to Mass Murder: Dr. Mehmed Reşid (1873–1919)," in Ronald Suny, et al., eds., *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 128; Toygun Altıntaş, "The Ottoman War on 'Anarchism' and Revolutionary Violence" in Houssine Alloul, et al., eds., *To Kill a Sultan: A Transnational History of the Attempt on Abdülhamid II (1905)* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 99–128; İlkay Yılmaz, "Propaganda by the Deed and Hotel Registration Regulations in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 4, no. 1 (2017): 137–156. For the international context see Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the*

The most immediate threat to the regime came not from separatist

minorities, radicals committed to abolishing the state, or even great power rivals,

but rather from an emerging strata of educated elites obsessed with preserving the

state at any cost. The cascading problems of the twentieth century were hardly new,

but they were intensifying and compounding one another. The Berlin Conference

and its aftermath provided a demonstrative illustration of Ottoman diplomatic

weakness and the Empire's generally precarious position within the late Victorian

international legal order; territorial contraction in southern Europe eroded its

celebrated religious pluralism, making Ottoman Muslims the demographic majority

and raising the stakes of various emerging national questions.[23] In sum, geopolitical

setbacks, market openings, financial insolvency, rural unrest, and simmering

identitarian tensions made a combustible brew.

Building on the foundation laid by his predecessors, Abdülhamid responded

to this general crisis with debt-financed programs to strengthen the Empire's

institutions and narrow the power differential with the North Atlantic imperialist

countries. The infrastructure constructed under his personal supervision, such as

railway and telegraph lines, urban clock towers, and nighttime illumination,

fundamentally altered the tempo and spatial constitution of everyday life, albeit at

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Anti-Colonial Imagination (London: Verso, 2005) and the introductory essay to
Raymond Craib and Barry Maxwell, eds., *No Gods, No Masters, No Peripheries: Global
Anarchisms* (Oakland: PM Press, 2015). On the transnational activities of Armenian
revolutionaries see Houri Berberian, *Roving Revolutionaries: Armenians and the
Connected Revolutions in the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Worlds* (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 2019).
[23] Ariel Salzmann, "Citizens in Search of a State: The Limits of Political Participation
in the Late Ottoman Empire" in Michael Hanagan and Charles Tilly, eds., *Extending
Citizenship, Reconfiguring States* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 37–66.

massive cost to foreign creditors. As noted above, Yıldız Palace also dedicated

tremendous resources to professional training for a young generation of military

officers, engineers, medical doctors, and civil servants, the cohort charged with

reinvigorating the Empire's basic institutions. By one estimate, Abdülhamid founded

no fewer than eighteen professional colleges in the quarter century after his ascent

to the throne. The aspirational white-collar alumni of these academies would

coalesce into the most effective bloc of opposition to the sultan's regime. The

overwhelming majority of the CUP leadership emerged from Hamidian post-

secondary schools, which became hotbeds of resistance to his administration as it

entered its second decade. Professional students bitterly resented the shuttering of

parliament, and turned decisively against the regime following the Balkan losses,

occupation of Egypt and Cyprus, and apparent murder of Midhat Pasha in 1883. A

decade later the underground opposition, constituted in secret as the Committee of

Ottoman Union (*Ittihad-ı Osmani*), found its center of gravity in the officer schools

and medical faculties of the capital. Though they represented the full spectrum of

Ottoman ethnic and regional backgrounds, the early Unionists were, in essence, a

conspiracy of military officers and medial doctors.[24] This presented the sultan with

a conundrum. If allowed to remain in Istanbul, these provocateurs would swell their

ranks, build alliances with older and more seasoned opposition figures, and

ultimately threaten the ruling order as a whole. While they shared his objective of

safeguarding Ottoman sovereignty and territorial integrity, they regarded his

imperious personal rule as the main obstacle to its realization, a viewpoint likely to

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[24] Erik Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010), 99.

find a receptive audience under the circumstances. Yet Abdülhamid was disinclined to let this crop of potential leaders go completely to waste.

Surveying the global history of penal colonies, Ann Laura Stoler argues that punitive expulsion is a mechanism for transforming a society from one that tolerates dissent to one that does not: the desired effect of these carceral geographies, and the underlying policy of punishing social or political mobilization with physical removal, is to create an illusion of ideological hegemony.[25] While this generalization applies to many of the cases she cites, the Hamidian regime century took a more nuanced approach, stratified along axes of social status, educational attainment, place of origin, and ethnic-religious identity. That is to say, penal exile was unevenly applied, serving different strategic purposes for elite versus subaltern Ottomans in the context of domestic political infighting and the geopolitics of empire, particularly frontier expansion. Regarding the Istanbul branch of the CUP, Yıldız Palace showed that it was prepared to tolerate a certain level of dissent, but only at a geographical remove. By installing exiled Unionists in administrative posts along the vulnerable Saharan frontier, under siege by the Italians and French, the sultan continued to extract a return on his investment while extinguishing the CUP's ability to organize (the humorous euphemism for this practice, *ikamete memur*, has a meaning akin to "officer in residence"). Penal colonies have almost invariably given rise to some form of labor exploitation in the service of colonial expansion, but Abdülhamid's

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[25] Ann Laura Stoler, "In Carceral Motion: Disposals of Life and Labour, " in Clare Anderson, ed., *A Global History of Convicts and Penal Colonies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 371–380.

employment of exile prisoners in the frontier bureaucracy was a unique, quintessentially Ottoman invention.[26]

On the other hand, if it was still possible to wring practical value from the young officers pressing constitutional demands in the capital, Yıldız Palace determined, perhaps correctly, that certain centrifugal forces in the rural hinterland were so resolutely opposed to its agenda that they needed to be dealt more definitively. Before examining the aftermath of the failed coup of 1896 and mass Libyan exile of the Istanbul CUP, I turn to the radically different case of the Hemvend Kurds, a tribe based in eastern Mosul province that supplied the Ottoman administration with constant headaches from the onset of the Tanzimat reforms. The Hamidian regime applied the *sürgün* to this quarrelsome nomadic population Hemvend in a manner much more consistent with the practices of its fifteenth-century forbearers (and Stoler's understanding of the penal exile as "removal from the polity"). The collective deportation of the tribe from Iraq to Benghazi was a show of brute force, a last resort measure that reflected Istanbul's exasperation and the fecklessness of provincial civil officials. Like the mobile populations of Tripolitania and Fezzan a generation earlier, the case of the Hemvend offers a clear example of how "fragmented communities at the edge of states" were punished severely for standing in the way of "progress and civilization" during the era of worldwide territorial spatialization.[27]

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[26] Seydi Toprak, "Fizan'da Sürgün Bir İttihatçı: Cami Bey," *Adıyaman Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 2015, no. 2 (2015): 683–710; Elie Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies* (London: Frank Cass, 1974), 124–161.
[27] Charles Maier, *Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

The Odyssey of the Hemvend Kurds

In March 1886, executing a directive from *Serasker* Ali Saib Pasha, the

Istanbul Port Authority (*Dersaadet Liman Dairesi*) assembled three hundred

Kurdish tribesmen and their families at the Beşiktaş waterfront. A crowd of

Istanbulites undoubtedly gathered in the middle distance to take in the spectacle of

these "wild and ignorant" outlaws from Mosul, who had just arrived to the capital to

face justice for terrorizing the rural communities of the province. Before long, the

detainees were herded onto a steamer belonging to the *Idare-i Mahsusa*, a shipping

enterprise operated by the Ottoman Navy that ran the only regular crossings from

Istanbul to Tripoli during the Hamidian years. In accordance with "his majesty's

exalted imperial decree" (*ferman-ı cenab-ı padişahi*), they were expelled across the

Mediterranean. Upon arrival military escorts (*asakir-i şahane*) herded them toward

their designated place of exile in the countryside south of Benghazi.[28]

Claiming origins around Qasr-e Shirin, the Hemvend tribe (*Aşiret-i Hemvend,

Hemvendliler*, *Hamawand*) was already a formidable fighting force when it migrated

to the Bazian hill country that separates Kirkuk from Sulaymaniyah, the Zagros

Mountains, and western Iran. From the time they arrived in eastern Mosul, the

Hemvend ruthlessly subjugated the sedentary population of the region, which they

referred to by the Arabic *miskin*: "poor pitiful things" or "servile people." Hemvend

brigandage was an intolerable, sometimes lethal burden to rural and village

communities, in addition to being a hindrance to Istanbul's provincial border

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[28] BOA Y PRK ZB 4/9 (March 1886). On Ali Saib and Hamidian military
administration see Sinan Kuneralp, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Erkan ve Ricali, 1839–1922:
Prosopografik Rehber* (Istanbul: Isis, 1999).

policing and developmental initiatives. Nevertheless, even critics acknowledged that the Hemvend presence brought some advantages, as the tribe functioned as a protection racket, shielding "client" villages from rival Bedouin and Kurdish looters.[29]

In a 1908 ethnographic essay, Mark Sykes (later infamous as one of the architects of Ottoman partition) characterizes the Hemvend as "1,200 families representing the most valiant, intelligent, and courageous of the Baban Kurds." Like most nomadic populations in the Ottoman-Iranian borderlands, he says, they intermarried freely with neighboring Arab tribes, and spoke fluent Arabic in addition to their native Kurdish dialect. Equally revered as horsemen and sharpshooters—especially with the Mauser rifles they delighted in confiscating from Ottoman gendarmes (*zaptiye*)—the Hemvend made caravan trade between Baghdad and Kermanshah a dangerous proposition in the last years of the nineteenth century. The tribe's usual method of attack was the blitz, which it employed to spectacular effect. Hemvend raiding parties would descend on hapless travelers from the hilltops at a gallop, plunder whatever they could carry, and retreat as soon their victims returned fire. They created havoc across the length of Kurdistan to the borders of modern Georgia, "[penetrating] far into the Caucasus in 1876, and

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[29] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992), 92–93. For an example of Ottoman government discourse on these raids see e.g. BOA MV 27/53 (1887), a testimonial delivered to the Council of Ministers on Hemvend attacks between Mosul and Sulaymaniyah.

[brining] back immense spoils," much to the chagrin of the incumbent administration, which had "recently done much to suppress [their] power."[30]

British officer, linguist, and Kurdophile Ely Soane travelled extensively in the Ottoman East, spoke fluent Kurmanji, and had many encounters with the tribe while living among the browbeaten communities they raided. Echoing Sykes, he depicts the Hemvend as "members of a race famous for bravery and lawlessness "[who] have made a name for themselves among their countrymen [by] outdoing the wildest in foolhardy raids and the bravest in their disregard of any danger." He also corroborates Sykes' account with respect to bad blood between the tribe and the Ottoman state, which had erupted intermittently "ever since the powers of the old pashas of Sulaimania were broken."[31] Soane correctly identifies the historical roots of these antagonisms. The same process of provincialization that the liberal imperial cartel initiated in Ottoman Libya in the 1840s began to take effect in the Empire's Iraqi provinces a decade later. After Istanbul applied settlement, commercialization, and private landholding principles to Mosul, it embarked on a collision course with the Hemvend, who remained in open rebellion until the Empire's collapse and

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[30] Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38 (1908): 451–486; "Disturbed State of Mesopotamia and Koordistan," *Times of India*, 20 August 1880 and an untitled follow-up piece in *Times of India*, 6 September 1880. Some of these passages from Skyes are also cited in Kasaba, *Moveable Empire*.
[31] Francis Maunsell, "Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia," *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 12, no.5 (1896): 225–241; Ely Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise: With Historical Notices of the Kurdish Tribes and the Chaldeans of Kurdistan* (London: J. Murray, 1912), 174.

territorial dismemberment, at which point British occupation forces inherited the problem.[32]

As in the case of the Libyan pilot province, Istanbul's objectives were relatively clear: curtail local discretionary authority, implement a uniform and rationalized administrative system, bolster the Empire's sovereign legal claims, extract surplus from the land on a more systematic basis, and pre-emptively demobilize any saboteurs in the hinterland. This entailed removing the last of the Baban Kurdish Emirs, a princely dynasty that had governed the region with a high degree of autonomy since the seventeenth century. The Baban family had long sponsored the Hemvend, and allowed them to raid with impunity. But it was not the loss of its sponsor alone that poisoned relations between the Hemvend and the authorities in Istanbul. Over the following years, two other points of contention emerged, especially the government's efforts to normalize and police the border with Qajar Iran, and the associated campaign to pacify and forcibly settle Iraq's nomadic populations for purposes of tax collection and military conscription, much like the process that unfolded in Tripolitania and Fezzan.[33]

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[32] As the First World War loomed, CUP officials somewhat ironically came to believe British consular officials in Mosul were inciting the Hemvend against them. See BOA DH MUİ 42/57 (February 1910). On British encounters with the Hemvend in the 1920s see Walace Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs, and Britons: The Memoir of Colonel W.A. Lyon in Kurdistan, 1918–1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

[33] On the fall of the Baban Emirs see Metin Atmaca, "Resistance to Centralisation in the Ottoman Periphery: The Kurdish Baban and Bohtan Emirates," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 4 (2019): 1–21. On the application of *Tanzimat* and Hamidian reforms to Iraqi Kurdistan see Gökhan Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890–1908* (London: Routledge, 2006); Sarah Shields, *Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000). On Ottoman-Iranian frontier politics and the problem of settling the region's nomadic tribes see Sabri Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843–1914* (Cambridge:

The Hemvend, who routinely crossed the border during their raids and considered settled agricultural life antithetical to their ethos, objected to this agenda. Enhanced border security, administrative realignments, and the heavy-handed implementation of the 1858 Ottoman Land Code at the expense of the region's nomadic populations inevitably brought the tribe into conflict with the local civil officials dispatched to implement the policy. The first of many violent episodes occurred in 1859, when Ömer Lütfi Pasha, a decorated veteran of the Crimean War appointed governor of Baghdad by Abdülmecid I, was recalled to the capital after hanging insubordinate Hemvend *aghas* without trial.[34] Such tensions continued to percolate for the next two decades, but it is only in the wake of the Ottoman defeat in 1878 that the Hemvend Kurds became a fixture of the Yıldız Palace archival records and letters of the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Vükela*), which took the lead on the issue. The Russian War created a power vacuum in Mosul, and the regime quickly became preoccupied with the restoration of public order (*asayiş*).[35] To that end, it coordinated with the Qajars to end cross-border raids and the harboring of fugitives, and in 1887 even agreed to resettle two hundred Hemvend Kurds, led by an infamous *agha* named Naki Kadir, who had absconded into Iranian territory.[36] In May of the same year, the Palace Secretariat began a lengthy correspondence with a

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Cambridge University Press, 2013); Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804–1946* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Arash Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

[34] Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 7.

[35] BOA Y A RES 35/14 (1886); BOA MV 15/56 (1887). It was also precisely at this time that the Hamidian government implemented the Vilayet Law of 1864, transforming Mosul into its own administrative district separate from Baghdad. See Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 74–86.

[36] BOA MV 16/73 (1887).

Kirkuk official named Ismail Pasha over the "ignorant and savage" (*cahil ve vahşi*) Hemvend, whose "wanton killings, robbery, and destruction" had reduced the small villages of Sulaymaniyah district to rubble.[37]

Yıldız Palace decided on a multifaceted strategy to end these outrages conclusively and with minimal injury to the Hemvend. Dispatching an expeditionary force from the capital, it confiscated the tribe's weapons, drove its members away from the Iranian border—to Mardin, Hakkari, and Mosul City—established schools to educate its youth for participation in Ottoman civic life, agreed to pay compliance stipends, and provided starter seeds to encourage the Hemvend to settle and farm. Similar measures had persuaded the Jaf tribe, the largest Kurdish confederation in eastern Mosul, to submit to Istanbul and furnish it with district governors (*kaymakam*), a result Abdülhamid hoped to duplicate.[38] When this conciliatory approach proved to no avail—the tribe immediately migrated back to the Bazian Hills and resumed their illicit activities—the regime adopted a more draconian policy. Several contemporary sources narrate the Hemvend's Libyan exodus as a singular mass dispossession. In fact, the tribe's forced relocation was staggered, proceeding in stages and along various routes, not all of which led to Cyrenaica. The Hemvend families transported from Istanbul to Tripoli in March 1886 were effectively part of an experimental trial in harsher punitive measures, and the government simultaneously banished another group of comparable size to İşkodra. Shortly thereafter, state authorities in Mosul confiscated all Hemvend assets, including horses and livestock, and auctioned them off to prevent the tribe from

[37] BOA Y EE 36/139 (May 1887); BOA İ MMS 3888 (August 1887).
[38] Ibid.

reconstituting itself.[39] Of the Hemvend subsequently exiled to Libya, most were brought overland from Iraqi Kurdistan through Anatolia to the capital, though one group of *aghas* was forcibly marched far north to Samsun, at which point they were delivered to the *Idare-i Mahsusa* and taken to Benghazi by way of the Black Sea and Marmara.[40]

Scattered to the far corners of the Empire, the Hemvend could no longer harass the villages and commercial routes around eastern Mosul. But the problem of what to do with the tribesmen once they had arrived in Benghazi continued to vex the regime into the 1890s. It debated several measures, including drafting them into the local gendarmerie, which was ultimately decided against on security grounds. However the government did providee compliance stipends and starter seeds to the Benghazi exiles, just as it had for the Hemvend families previously transferred to Mardin, Hakkari, and metropolitan Mosul. These measures proved just as ineffective as before. Soon the tribe complained its peace wages had fallen into arrears, and predictably began harassing local residents in the familiar way; Istanbul responded by breaking them up into still smaller units and resettling them to various remote locations around the district. In 1889 some Hemvend families were dislocated further, into Saharan Tripoli, when resources in Benghazi proved insufficient to reign in their abuses.[41]

A remarkable letter from the military leadership in Kirkuk to Yıldız Palace dated November 1889 indicates that a group of Hemvend bandits had escaped

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[39] Kasaba, *Moveable Empire*, 115.
[40] BOA İ ŞD 94/5593 (1888); BOA İ MMS 105/4459 (1888).
[41] BOA MV 35/71 (1888); BOA MV 40/63 (1888); BOA MV 42/56 (1888); BOA MV 47/54 (1889); BOA MV 53/18 (1889); BOA MV 69/36 (1891).

government detention in Benghazi, traveled nearly 2,000 miles back to eastern

Mosul on foot, and crossed into Iranian territory.[42] Istanbul quickly notified the

Iranian embassy, and the fugitives were soon captured and extradited in a

ceremonial exchange between border officials.[43] Despite the swift action taken

against the escapees, their remarkable efforts to return to eastern Mosul occasioned

a rending of garments at the top of the Ottoman administrative hierarchy.[44] The

government sent the recaptured Hemvend delivered from Iranian custody back to

provincial Libya in early 1890, along with explicit instructions to the *mutasarrıf* of

Benghazi to keep them under close supervision and prevent them from escaping.[45]

The tenacious Hemvend ultimately proved impossible to contain, both for the

Hamidian regime and its local proxies in Mosul, Benghazi, and Tripoli, and the

tribesmen made a number of successful attempts to escape from the Sahara over the

following years.[46] Punitive expulsion likewise failed to accomplish much of

consequence on the Iraqi front. Ottoman officials temporarily interrupted but never

conclusively ended the raids, which resumed even after the activation of a Sixth

Army regiment and creation of a special operations unit in Baghdad to confront the

tribe in 1898. Meanwhile, the capital bureaucracy continued to receive pleas from

Kirkuk to intervene and put a stop to Hemvend "bandit activities" (*eşkiyalık*

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[42] BOA Y MTV 41/66 (November 1889).
[43] BOA Y MTV 42/10 (December 1889).
[44] By this point the entire imperial "cabinet"—the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Finance, War, Education, Pious Endowments, Justice, Trade, and the Navy, along with the Grand Vizier, and even *Şeyhülislam* Bodrumlu Ömer Lütfi Efendi— had become involved with crafting the response to the Hemvend crisis. See BOA İ MMS 119/5132 (1890).
[45] BOA Y PRK ML 11/2 (1890); BOA MV 69/36 (1891); BOA MV 69/45 (1891); BOA Y A HUS 234/48 (1892).
[46] BOA DH MKT 62/13 (1893).

faaliyetleri) until the eve of the constitutional revolution but, as a memorandum to

Mosul's political leaders in 1907 attests, Istanbul simply lacked the resources, above

all military resources, to bring the outlaws to heel, essentially leaving provincial

officials to fend for themselves.[47] When Ely Soane encountered the Hemvend nearly

twenty years after their escape from Benghazi and uncanny return, they regaled him

with tall tales of their exploits and boasted of having looted "Arab and Turk alike" on

their way back to Mosul.[48]

What does the Hemvend case reveal about the nature of Ottoman territorial

spatialization in the Hamidian era and the imaginative construction of provincial

Libya? Mounting legal and diplomatic pressures along the imperial frontier, places

where Istanbul competed with European colonial empires as an expansionist player

in the late nineteenth century, created unique difficulties for the central

administration. Given the uncertainty of Ottoman sovereignty in these sensitive

areas, demonstrating authority and the government's ability to maintain public

order became existentially important. Under these conditions, policymakers in the

Ottoman center began to construct a new notion of provincial Libya as a heterotopic

space, a desolate container for rebellious groups from across the Empire or

"Saharan Siberia." As I show in the following section, the entanglement of legal-

diplomatic and domestic political crises that created the demand for such a carceral

project threatened the seat of Hamidian power by the late 1890s. The "penal colony"

phase of Libyan provincialization thus made Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan—

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[47] BOA Y MTV 180/117 (August 1898); BOA DH TMIK M 239/36 (May 1907).
[48] Soane, *Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, 179.

imaginatively constituted from Istanbul as impossibly faraway and exotic locales—a

critical frontline of the most contentious and consequential questions of the era.

Wanderings Wilderness: Unionist Exiles in the Hamidian Sahara

On 29 August 1897, slightly a decade after the first wave of Hemvend

deportations began, another *Idare-i Mahsusa* vessel sat in Üsküdar's Salacak harbor,

waiting to escort a rather more distinguished group of detainees to Tripoli: seventy-

eight high-ranking officers, civil servants, and white-collar professionals, nearly all

of them graduates of the Empire's premier institutions. The name of the ship that

ferried them out of Istanbul, the *Şeref*, quickly became synonymous with

Abdülhamid's dictatorial excesses, while the passengers themselves entered

popular consciousness as revolutionary martyrs, the so-called "Victims of the

Honor" (*Şeref Kurbanları*, a term with conspicuous religious overtones, evoking the

Eid al-Adha/Kurban Bayramı ritual of animal sacrifice).[49] The prisoners comprised

the activist core of the Istanbul CUP, and their mass banishment to Libya—the

largest politically motivated deportation of the Hamidian era—was the regime's

most decisive maneuver against the organization to date (Fig. 1).[50]

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[49] The term itself is quite strange, and the choice to label the exiles victims of the
ship itself, rather than victims of the regime, or victims of despotism, is downright
perplexing. For the sake of clarity and consistency I refer to them throughout as the
Şeref exiles.
[50] Ali Fahri Ağababa, *Şeref Kurbanları* (Istanbul: Artcivic, 2011). This memoir
represents its author's journal entries for the years 1896–1899. He sometimes
refers to the eponymous group of political prisoners, less impressionistically, as
Şeref Yolcuları, or the "passengers of the *Honor*."

Figure 1: A group of the "Şeref Kurbanları" (*Evrensel*, 11 May 2019)

The generation of Ottoman radicals that came of age under the previous administration was already well acquainted with penal exile as an instrument of political repression. As Florian Riedler observes, the governing elite prevented any loyal opposition from conducting its affairs in the light of day, which naturally encouraged the development of a conspiratorial political culture. In turn, these anti-government conspiracies—spearheaded by religious conservatives, disaffected bureaucrats, or progressives in the Young Ottoman mold—heightened the anxieties of an insecure ruling class that habitually overreacted to public criticism. For example, Namık Kemal, poet laureate of Ottoman liberalism and one of the movement's intellectual luminaries, fled to Paris to evade treason charges in 1867 and, following a brief return to Istanbul, spent an additional three years in detention

on Cyprus after the 1873 theatrical debut of his *Vatan yahut Silistre* ("Fatherland")

incited popular sentiment against the authorities.[51]

The exile of political opponents, especially high-profile individuals, became

increasingly common during the acute crisis of the late 1870s and early 1880s, in

part because of its chilling effect on public discourse. Midhat Pasha, father of the

Ottoman constitution and a contemporary of Namık Kemal, is likely the best-known

early casualty of the Hamidian *sürgün*. His storied career embodies the

bureaucratized form of punitive expulsion that dominated Ottoman politics in the

decades leading up to 1908. A decorated Tanzimat man with impeccable credentials

as a progressive reformer in Serbia, Bulgaria, and Iraq—the latter was effectively an

exile post—he also briefly served as Grand Vizier to Abdülhamid late in 1876.

Though he was banished to Europe after the suspension of the constitution, British

pressure forced the sultan to accept his return in 1878, at which time he was

appointed to Syria. As his relationship with the regime continued to deteriorate in

the early 1880s, Abdülhamid recalled him from Damascus and sent him into de facto

exile again in Izmir, where he administered the province of Aydın for nearly a year.

His murder shortly thereafter in Taif, an oasis town south of Mecca where he was

exiled for the final time after a show trial in which he was found guilty of Abdülaziz's

regicide, effectively inaugurated the era of Hamidian autocracy.[52]

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[51] Florian Riedler, *Opposition and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire: Conspiracies and Political Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2010); Martin Strohmeier, "Exile in Cyprus: The Cases of Namik Kemal and Subh-i Azal," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 32 (2015): 221–234.
[52]Midhat Pasha's son reproduces his father's letters from exile in the Hijaz, which relate in excruciating detail the tortures visited upon him by Ottoman prison officers. See Ali Haydar Bey Midhat, *Life of Midhat Pasha: A Record of his Services,*

The officers and civil servants who inherited the Ottoman constitutional mantle from the likes of Namık Kemal and Midhat Pasha suffered through similar bouts of faraway internment, most often in Tripoli and Fezzan. The frequent omission of Hamidian Libya in political narratives of the CUP is therefore difficult to comprehend, as it belies the formative role of Saharan exile in the early life of the organization, particularly its Istanbul branch, which has likewise received less scholarly attention than the Young Turk colony in Paris led by Ahmed Rıza, or the Macedonian chapter that acted as the revolutionary vanguard in 1908. Even before the failed coup of 1896, Abdülhamid exiled three quarters of the CUP's founding members—Abdullah Cevdet, Mehmed Reşid, and İshak Sükuti—to Libya, while the fourth, İbrahim Temo, escaped to Romania before the Hamidian police could apprehend him.[53]

Abdullah Cevdet, the CUP's most original and iconoclastic thinker, gained a reputation as a political troublemaker during his school days at the Military Medical Academy (*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye-i Askeriye*), and had already built a lengthy arrest record by the time he graduated in July 1894. Briefly employed as an ophthalmologist at Haydarpaşa Hospital and frontline medic during a cholera outbreak in Diyarbakır, he returned to Istanbul in 1895 at the height of the anti-Armenian pogroms. In this tense atmosphere, the Council of Ministers labeled him a seditious individual and

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Political Reforms, Banishment, and Judicial Murder (London: John Murray, 1903); Najib Saliba, "The Achievements of Midhat Pasha as Governor of the Province of Syria, 1878–1880," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 3 (1978): 307–323.
[53] Erik Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905–1926* (Leiden: Brill, 1984); M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

sentenced him to exile in Tripoli, along with thirty other co-conspirators. Held first

in the dungeons of the ancient Tripoli fortress—the old Ottoman practice of

kalebend was still occasionally in use even at this late date—he was eventually

permitted to move freely around the city by the terms of an imperial decree (*irade-i*

seniye). Soon after this easing of restrictions, Cevdet began corresponding with the

Rıza faction and organizing other Unionists exiles in provincial Libya. When the

regime caught wind of these activities, he and İshak Sükuti fled to Geneva by way of

Tunisia and Paris before the secret police could execute an order to reimprison

them in Fezzan.[54]

   "Çerkez" Mehmed Reşid Şahingiray, who contemplated hiring an anarchist

gang to assassinate the sultan above, was also an alumnus of the Military Medical

Academy and Haydarpasa Hospital, and was banished to Libya during the same

crackdown. Unlike Cevdet and Sükuti, however, he remained there for much of his

young life, only leaving after the outbreak of the revolution in the summer of 1908.

This was likely in part because the regime took an extremely permissive approach

to his internment. Mehmed Reşid continued to practice medicine at the city hospital,

and even participated in charitable activities, working with fellow exiles to open a

cinema in Tripol, as well as a library that offered free courses to local residents. Two

years later, he married a woman named Mazlume Hanım whose father Ziya, a

former adjutant major (*kolağası*), was also living in exile as a regime opponent. By

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[54] For biographical detail on Cevdet see M. Şükrü Hanioğlu *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981).

all accounts they enjoyed a pleasant domestic life until they departed for Istanbul and took a more active role in politics after the revolution.[55]

A final noteworthy exile from these first CUP graduating classes is the aforementioned Cami Baykurt, who played an important role in provincial Libyan politics before and after the reinstatement of the constitution. He arrived in Tripoli in April 1896, along with a number of fellow classmates registered by the palace as CUP members or sympathizers. Educated from childhood in Hamidian schools, he graduated from the Imperial Military Academy (*Harbiye Mektebi*) at the rank of lieutenant (*mülazım-ı sani*) before receiving his assignment—a de facto exile sentence—in the Sahara. Baykurt's memoirs express no dissatisfaction with this post. In fact, he enjoyed a sense of freedom in the anonymity of the desert, and was pleased to discover that he had easy access to European periodicals smuggled from French Tunisia. Briefly assigned to another office in Benghazi, he returned to Tripoli as an instructor in the local military boarding school just in time for the arrival of the gang of seventy-eight.[56]

By the middle of 1896, the original Istanbul chapter of the CUP had expanded massively. No longer confined to the dormitories of the imperial colleges—in fact much of the student activist base had been neutralized—the central leadership of the organization was reconfigured with an unexpected mix of high-ranking officers from the War Ministry, tenured civil servants, and prominent *ulema* at the helm.

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[55] Hans-Lukas Kieser, *A Quest for Belonging: Anatolia beyond Empire and Nation* (Istanbul: Isis, 2007), 181–195.
[56] Cami Baykurt, *Son Osmanlı Afrikası'nda Hayat: Çöl İnsanları, Sürgünler, ve Jön Türkler* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009). These are Cami Bey's diary entries for the decade 1898–1908.

This new central committee was confident, perhaps to a fault, and smelled blood in the water as Abdülhamid's international and domestic standing sank to a twenty-year nadir after the violence in Armenia. Opposition to the regime within the officer class had reached unprecedented levels, seminary students were in revolt on the streets of the capital, and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (*Dashnaktsutyun*) was freely distributing pamphlets enjoining Ottoman Muslims to join them in their struggle. Though support from the Rıza faction was vague and mealy-mouthed, the Istanbul leadership decided to seize this potentially revolutionary moment and began planning an operation. They made contact with the heir apparent, Mehmed Reşad, and went so far as to set aside a space inside the War Ministry for him to receive the ceremonial oath of allegiance (*biat*). With the sanction of an influential group of *ulema*, the central committee decided to send a contingent of "self-sacrificing officers" (*fedai-i zabıtan*) into Yıldız Palace, where they would defy the sultan's praetorian guard to stop them from carrying out the putsch.[57] Just as the CUP was about to strike, the secretary of the Istanbul center, Nadir Bey, disclosed the plan to a certain İsmail Pasha, later revealed to be an informant. Once Abdülhamid was made aware of the plot, an immense crackdown ensued with anywhere between 350 and 600 individuals arrested, including the heads of the gendarmerie and Istanbul police along with numerous officers, bureaucrats, and clergymen. The prisoners that would eventually travel to Libya on the *Şeref* were initially detained at the gendarmerie headquarters and torture dungeons of the Imperial Shipyard (*Tersane Zindanı*) before being transferred to Taşkışla, an

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[57] Hanioğlu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 84–87.

infamous military barrack in Beyoğlu that was also the seat of the Hamidian

regime's permanent court martial (*Divan-ı Harb-i Mahsusa*). Their August 1897 trial

before military tribunal was a formality, its outcome a foregone conclusion. Fearing

backlash from the officer corps and unwilling to let their human capital go to waste,

the regime commuted death sentences for each of the detainees and exiled them to

Fezzan.[58]

Occupation	Number of Prisoners
Physician	30
Naval Officer	14
Officer School Cadet	12
Artillery Officer	6
Engineer	4
University Faculty	2
Staff Officer	2
Cavalry	2
Foreign Ministry Official	2
Clergy	1
Lawyer	1
Infantry	1
Unknown	1

Figure 2: *Şeref* exiles by occupation

Like the organization to which they belonged, the *Şeref* exiles comprised a

wide array of Ottoman ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds (Fig. 2). Muslims

from the Balkans and Arab provinces, Circassian and Volga Tatar émigrés, sons of

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[58]Ibid, 86; Ağababa, *Şeref Kurbanları*. For background on Abdülhamid's sophisticated intelligence gathering and espionage networks see Emre Gör, *II. Abdülhamid'in Hafiye Teşkilatı* (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2015). On Taşkışla, which today comprises part of the architecture faculty at Istanbul Technical University, see Robert Devereux, "Süleyman Pasha's 'The Feeling of the Revolution,'" *Middle Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (1979): 3–10. Some of the *Şeref* exiles were able to avoid the trip south to Fezzan, remaining instead in Tripoli thanks to the intercession of Namık Pasha, Governor of Tripoli at the time, though the general attitude of exile memoirs toward his office is at best ambivalent.

elite families from Aegean Turkey, and even two Jewish brothers from Salonica—

Avram and Aşer Salem—were included in their ranks. The medical profession was

overrepresented within the group, but a significant portion was also drawn from the

naval and artillery corps, as well as the War College. They included a number of

white-collar civil servants—engineers, Foreign Ministry officials, and an attorney—

as well as a single *alim*, Hasan Necmettin Efendi, then affiliated with a Sufi lodge

near Koca Mustafa Pasha Mosque in Fatih. Dressed in traditional attire in a sea of

fezzes and military uniforms, he stands out conspicuously in Fig. 1 above.[59]

Several members of the gang of seventy-eight went on to prominent careers

in politics during the Second Constitutional Period and early years of the Turkish

Republic, notably Yusuf Akçura and Ahmet Ferit Tek. Both men migrated to Istanbul

(from Kazan and Bursa respectively) in the early 1880s and graduated from the War

College at the rank of lieutenant in 1896. The pair began to experiment with Islamist

and nationalist ideas during their school years, raising official suspicion and leading

directly to their exile after the failed putsch.[60] The pair was originally imprisoned in

Murzuk, but successfully petitioned for a transfer to the more hospitable

environment of Tripoli in July of 1898. In 1899, they crossed secretly into French

Tunisia and escaped to Paris, where they quickly in inserted themselves into the

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[59] Ağababa, *Şeref Kurbanları.*

[60] See the biographical preface to Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınlar, 1995); Ahmet Ersoy's piece on Akçura in Ersoy, et al., eds., *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013); M. Hakan Yavuz, "Nationalism and Islam: Yusuf Akçura and 'Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset,'" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (1993): 175–207; James Meyer, *Turks Across Empires: Marketing Muslim Identity in the Russian-Ottoman Borderlands, 1856–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Yenal Ünal, *Ahmet Ferit Tek* (Istanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2009).

Rıza circle. After a brief return to Russia, Akçura established a residence in Cairo, where he published a famous polemic, "Three Styles of Politics" (*Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*) for the magazine *Türk* in 1904. In this tract, he rejects Ottoman nationalism (*Osmanlılık*) and pan-Islamism (*İslamcılık*), identifying Turkish identitarianism (*Türkçülük,* literally "Turkism") as the ideology of the future. While these ideas initially failed to resonate, they gained significant traction after the 1911 Italian occupation of Libya and 1912 Balkan War reduced the Empire to the status of an exclusively Asian power. Akçura's critique signaled a paradigm shift in Turkish politics: rejecting ecumenical Ottomanism and multi-ethnic Islamic solidarity in favor of a "German" conception of the national community based on race (*ırk*), "Three Styles of Politics" heralded the transition from late Empire to early Republic..[61]

After the constitution was reinstated in 1908, Akçura and Ferit Tek returned to Istanbul and assumed important roles in national politics. By this time, both operated on the margins of the CUP mainstream, as their hardline Turkist view soon put them at odds with party leaders. Ferit Tek was expelled from the CUP in 1909 after criticizing it on the floor of parliament. These tensions created an opening for the pair to pursue their ethno-nationalist agenda without interruption, and by 1912 they founded the influential Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*), a chauvinist organization dedicated to elevating "Turkish" national consciousness. The Hearths were a driving force for the Turkification of Anatolia during and after the War of Independence, and claimed over 30,000 members across 257 departments by 1930.

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[61] Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*.

Mustafa Kemal eventually moved against them, subordinating the Hearths completely to the officially sanctioned People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) later in the decade. This crackdown on pan-Turkist and Turanist views, which ran against the grain of Kemalist territorial nationalism, is a testament to their enduring popularity.[62]

Yusuf Akçura and the other *Şeref* exiles were men of elite social standing, members of a political subculture that was deeply sympathetic to Alfred Dreyfus, not as a victim of antisemitism, but as a patriot unjustly persecuted by the homeland he wanted nothing more than to serve.[63] In light of these leanings, it is perhaps to be expected Akçura was not the only member of the group to harbor literary aspirations. "Silistreli" Mustafa Hamdi (Fig. 3), another War College graduate and captain in the artillery corps, produced a five-act, semi-autobiographical play about his exile years entitled *Afv ile Mahkum yahut Şeref Kurbanları* ("Convicted with

[62] Ibid. The two founders continued on in high-profile positions. Akçura represented Istanbul and Kars in parliament before serving as president of the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*), in effect the Kemalist Ministry of Official History. Ferit Tek was also twice elected to parliament (first for Istanbul, then Kütahya), received a sensitive ambassadorial post to London, and served as Minister of Finance and Interior. On the Turkish Hearths see Ilia Xypolia, "Racist Aspects of Modern Turkish Nationalism," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 111–124; Sibel Demirer, "Anthropology as a Nation-Building Rhetoric: The Shaping of Turkish Anthropology (from 1850s to 1940s)," *Dialectical Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (2011): 111–129; Senem Aslan, "'Citizen, Speak Turkish!': A Nation in the Making," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 245–272; and more broadly Murat Ergin, *"Is the Turk a White Man?": Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). On their parliamentary careers see Sema Yıldırım and Behçet Zeynel, eds., *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Albümü, 1920–2010: I. Cilt, 1920–1950* (Ankara: TBMM Basın ve Halkla İlişkiler Müdürlüğü Yayınları, 2010).
[63] I am grateful to Edhem Eldem for this observation. See also Orit Bashkin, "Three Syrian Intellectuals, a French Jewish Officer, and the Question of Late Ottoman Pluralism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 4 (2018): 765–768; Özgür Türesay, "L'affaire Dreyfus vue par les intellectuels ottomans," *Turcica* 47 (2016): 235–256.

Clemency"), the first edition of which was published in Cairo near the end of 1907.

Apart from the Bulgarian origin suggested by his nickname, scant information is

available about the life of the author prior to the 1896 coup attempt. The play itself

offers a thinly fictionalized account of the key events leading up to the banishment

of the gang of seventy-eight, as well as their time in Libya. The Hamidian censors

made public performances of politically critical theater impossible, and as a result,

Afv ile Mahkum, like most Ottoman-language plays of its time, reads more like a

novel than a stage drama (it is a sprawling tome of over 300 pages).[64] Hamdi claims

he began working on the play from the Tripoli dungeon soon after the gang of

seventy-eight were brought ashore, and finished it over a period of years in Paris

and his hometown on the bank of the Lower Danube. The action of the play

corresponds to its author's journey. Beginning in Istanbul, *Afv ile Mahkum* relates

the story of the *Şeref* exiles through the eyes of protagonist Behzat Bey, an officer

and "young patriot" (*genç vatansever*) who is accused of making an anti-government

speech at a Beyoğlu coffee house (*kıraathane*). In the second act, he is court

martialed at Taşkışla and, after two months of interrogation, sentenced to exile in

Fezzan along with comrades İlhami Bey, a military physician, and Şeyh Sarım Efendi

a likely stand-in for the aforementioned Hasan Necmettin who is listed in the

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[64] The unusual title refers to the fact that the gang of seventy-eight all received the death penalty after court martial, but had their sentences commuted to Libyan exile by Abdülhamid, as mentioned above. The author's preface indicates that he finished the manuscript by 1900—he claims to have presented it as a "gift to the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress"—but saw its publication delayed repeatedly by financial constraints and the repressive political atmosphere of the time. Silistreli Mustafa Hamdi, *Afv ile Mahkum yahut Şeref Kurbanları* (Cairo: Osmanlı Matbaası, 1907).

dramatis personae as "a luminous individual" (*nurani bir zat*).[65] After the overland journey to Fezzan and a series of increasingly dispiriting encounters with corrupt local officials, the heroes follow the example of their real-life counterparts: taking advantage of an *irade-i seniye* permitting them to transfer back to the provincial capital, they begin to plot an escape to Europe.[66]

Figures 3 and 4: Left: "Silistreli" Mustafa Hamdi in exile c. 1897 (from his *Afv ile Mahkum*). Right: MP Sami Çölgeçen, 1920s (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Albümü, 1920–2010: I. Cilt, 1920–1950*).

Of all the *Şeref* exiles, perhaps none is more colorful than Sami Çölgeçen (Fig. 4)—his fitting sobriquet means "the desert crosser"—a figure characterized by his grandson and namesake as a "combination of James Bond, Indiana Jones, and T.E.

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[65] Ibid, 13.
[66] Ibid.

Lawrence."[67] He left a similar impression on his contemporaries: Swiss born British

adventurer and education director in the colonial government of Northern Nigeria

Hanns Vischer, who became a close friend and confidant to Sami, gives a sense of his

character in a description of their first meeting in Murzuk in September 1906:

> Among the traders, who sat in the market in long rows, under small bits of
> grass mats, as they do in Northern Nigeria, I noticed a European Turk selling
> small quantities of tea and sugar to the Murzuk ladies. When no customer
> came, he took comfort in no less a book than a volume of Baudelaire! [...] It
> was Samy Bey, a Young Turk from Philippopolis [Plovdiv, Bulgaria], a former
> officer in the Turkish navy, who had been condemned to a hundred and one
> years of exile and sent to Murzuk.[68]

Sami Çölgeçen's memoir is the richest literary artifact of the mass exile of the

Istanbul CUP, an outlandish mélange of travelogue, polemic, and amateur

ethnography. Born in Berkofça in the far northwest of Bulgaria (not Plovdiv, as

Vischer claims), its author graduated the Naval College as a deck lieutenant before

running afoul of the authorities and getting ensnared in the post-coup crackdown of

1897. For reasons that remain obscure, the palace rehabilitated him after two years

of Libyan exile, at which point he was assigned to supervise maritime trade in the

Eastern Mediterranean, serving in the ports of Syrian Tripoli (Trablusşam),

Alexandretta, and Haifa. Resuming his subversive activities in the Levant, Sami was

indicted a second time in 1902 then exiled permanently to Murzuk. He soon married

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[67] Sami Çölgeçen, *Sahra-yı Kebir'i Nasıl Geçtim* (Istanbul: ARK Kitapları, 2014), 5. The author first published the story of his daring escape from Saharan exile as a feuilleton in *Milliyet* in the late 1920s.
[68] Hanns Vischer, *Across the Sahara from Tripoli to Bornu* (London, Edward Arnold: 1910), 137–138. For political context on Vischer's time in Ottoman Libya see FO 371/149.

a local woman named Mebruke from the northern Fezzan town of Sawknah [Sükne] and appeared to establish a semblance of normal life. But from the beginning of his second internment he was meticulously plotting his escape.[69]

On the eve of his departure in February 1908, Sami Çölgeçen wrote a letter to then-governor Celal Bey. After thanking him for his compassionate treatment over the years, the escaped prisoner excoriates his former captor as a "servant of a tyrannical regime" (*istibdad-ı idarenin memuru*) while declaring it his patriotic duty to escape bondage in Fezzan and find a more suitable base of operations to "rescue his nation from its imprisonment" (*...vazife kaçmak, kurtulmak, vatanımın esaretten kurtarılması için başka diyarlara gidip uğraşmak*).[70] With this last testament written and the final preparations made, Sami fled captivity with eight Unionist comrades and his young son Yadigar in tow, charting a southbound course across the Sahara never before taken by a non-native traveler. Heading first to Bilma in northern Niger, the convoy zigzagged its way to Lake Chad before crossing the length of Nigeria by boat and reaching the Atlantic Ocean at the Gulf of Guinea, a grueling six-month trip punctuated by fear, hunger, and several near-lethal brushes with hostile tribes and deadly animals.[71]

Several noteworthy themes emerge from Çölgeçen's recollections of his flight across the desert. Throughout the narrative, he emphasizes the goodwill of African Muslims toward the "heroic Turks" and their sympathy for the Ottoman cause. According to Sami, many of the people he met expressed their hope that Istanbul

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[69] Çölgeçen, *Sahra-yı Kebir'i Nasıl Geçtim*, 5–22.
[70] Ibid, 39–41.
[71] Ibid.

would undertake a more active role in the region's politics and counter malign

European influence. One interlocutor suggested to him that palace eunuchs had

lobbied for such a policy in the past—as had local notables who sent extravagant

gifts and overtures to the sultan through Egypt—to no avail. Corresponding to this

philo-Ottoman rhetoric, Sami laments the effects of European colonialism on the

countries of the Sahara and Sahel, reserving particular scorn for the British, who he

condemns for using cutting-edge weapons to brutalize innocent people, upending

pre-colonial African economies, and degrading public morality with alcohol and

prostitution.[72]

A final remarkable feature of Çölgeçen's memoir is its treatment of the

Tuareg, which places the text within the colonial ethnographic discourse of its time

and foreshadows its author's later nationalist activism. During his years in Murzuk,

Sami ingratiated himself to local Tuareg leaders, who sold him the rifles,

ammunition, sheepskin canteens, and camels he needed to mount his escape. On his

way to Lake Chad, he embedded with other Tuareg confederations, and likely would

have failed without their hospitality and assistance. Following his return to Istanbul

and over the course of several years, he wrote numerous articles (which were late

appended to his memoirs) to correct what he regarded as European

misrepresentations of the Tuareg, their history, and customs. Incredibly, he presents

the "blue people of the Sahara" as a kind of lost Turkish tribe. Proceeding from a folk

etymology that traces the ethnonym "Tuareg" to "Turk," he analogizes their lifestyle

to the pastoral nomadic peoples of the Eurasian Steppe. According to his hypothesis,

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[72] Ibid.

their prominence in the Saharan trade mirrors the historical role of "Turks" along

the commercial routes of the Silk Road. Even their diets are comparable, he claims,

as the Tuareg enjoy a fermented beverage of milk and dates that is indistinguishable

from *boza*. He concludes by noting that the Tuareg-Tifinagh alphabet bears an

uncanny resemblance to Hittite cuneiform, and promises to take up these leads

again at a later date. Though he never managed to do so, these racially inflected,

pseudo-anthropological flourishes suggest a rapidly developing if protean Turkish

national consciousness.[73]

Once Sami and his party of "political refugees" (*mülteci-i siyasiler*) crossed

into Bilma, they were able to solicit help from Vischer, who provided them with

medical care, an armed escort, and transportation downriver from Yola through

Lokoja to Forçados on the Bight of Benin. When they reached the Atlantic coast—the

sight of the water moved them to tears—Vischer also chartered maritime passage

for the group, and they departed for Liverpool by way of the Canary Islands in

August 1908. Sami Çölgeçen and his companions learned of the previous month's

constitutional revolution en route and celebrated heartily. After their historic effort

to escape captivity through uncharted corridors of the Sahara, they returned to

Istanbul just as the CUP was issuing a general amnesty for political prisoners of the

Hamidian regime.[74] The Ottoman archives corroborate his seemingly fantastic

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[73] Ibid, 409–466. Çölgeçen published these reflections with the assistance of Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, another Libyan exile whose writings are among the best known Ottoman language sources on the Sanusi Order, the subject of the next chapter.

[74] Abdülhamid's exile to Salonica after the failed counter-revolution of March 1909 provided some brief and ironic closure to the story of late Ottoman punitive deportations. See Erik Zürcher, "31 Mart: A Fundamentalist Uprising in Istanbul in

version of these events: the new revolutionary government kept receipts from their

British counterparts, who respectfully pressed Istanbul to reimburse their colonial

office in Niger for the convoy's medical treatment, transportation, and per diem

expenses (to the tune £223, roughly £27,000 adjusted for inflation).[75]

<u>Osman's Tree and the Sheltering Sky: Hamidian Exile and the Contradictions of Late</u>
<u>Ottoman Federalism</u>

Sami Çölgeçen, like most of his peers in the gang of seventy-eight, continued

to lead a politically active life after his flight from Murzuk. By October 1910, he had

returned to Libya as a sub-district governor and helped to organize its defense after

the Italian invasion a year later. In the years before the Ottoman collapse, he also

served as a provincial administrator in Nejd, Kirkuk, and Karbala before taking an

intelligence assignment in Europe. After the founding of the Turkish Republic, he

departed for Libya a final time to oversee the implementation of various short-lived

accords negotiated between indigenous anticolonial guerillas and the victorious

European powers of the First World War. He spent the final years of his life in

Anatolia, serving as an elected official for Ankara and taking on a prominent role in

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April 1909?" in Noémi Lévy-Aksu and François Georgeon, eds., *The Young Turk
Revolution and the Ottoman Empire: The Aftermath of 1908*, 196–211. A fleeting
victory, as the practice continued under the CUP. See Christine Philliou, *Turkey: A
Past Against History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).
[75] Çölgeçen, *Sahra-yı Kebir'i Nasıl Geçtim*, 409–466. For the Ottoman archival files on
the escapees and the debts they accumulated to the British government see BOA
BEO 3777/283253 (June 1909); BOA BEO 3670/275237 (November 1909); BOA
BEO 3717/78739 (1910). On the return of exiles after the revolution see Özgür
Türesay, "Political Victims of the Old Regime under the Young Turk Regime (1908–
1911)," in Aksu and Georgeon, eds., *Young Turk Revolution,* 67–95.

the Turkish Hearths founded by Yusuf Akçura and Ferit Tek, with whom he had shared the ordeal of Saharan exile.

Sami Çölgeçen and other Unionists exiled to Libya before and after the botched coup of 1896 exerted a powerful influence over late Ottoman and early Republican politics, frequently appearing at the center of watershed developments from North Africa to Anatolia. As a result of their efforts, metropolitan Tripoli became a provincial stronghold of the CUP, and the organization began to cultivate a local cadre in addition to its robust exile membership by the turn of the century. A crucial milestone in this process came in 1902, when the consequences of the Hamidian *sürgün* finally blew back on Yıldız Palace, putting Abdülhamid at greater risk than at any prior time in his long reign. Immediately following the Paris Congress of Ottoman Liberals in February of that year, a new CUP central committee comprised of the two princes Sabahaddin and Lütfullah, their father Damad Mahmud Pasha, Midhat Pasha's son Ali Haydar, and future Albanian Prime Minister İsmail Kemal began conspiring to overthrow the sultan. Their plan, which enjoyed covert British support and nearly came into effect, would have seen the exile governor of Tripoli Matlı Recep Pasha and his aides-de-camp, Şevket Bey and Cami Baykurt, sail up the Mediterranean with the Libyan division of the Ottoman Army, occupy the Dardanelles, and force the sultan's resignation.[76]

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[76] Opinions diverge as to why this plan failed. See M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16–27 and İhsan Burak Birecikli, "Sultan II. Abdülhamit'e Karşı Başarısız Bir Darbe Teşebbüsü," *Batman Üniversitesi Yaşam Bilimleri Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (2012): 683–697. Matlı Recep Pasha was an old-guard Ottoman liberal and decorated veteran with great administrative experience in Iraq and the Levant. Abdülhamid sent him into an exile governorship in Tripoli in 1900, fearing his political intentions and reputation

When this plan failed to materialize in the final hour, Recep Pasha and Cami

Baykurt stayed behind in Libya and continued to pursue a national activist course.

Within a year, the latter was promoted to sub-district governor for Ghat, a

southwestern town in Fezzan bordering French Algeria. Apart from being an

energetic bureaucrat, Cami produced short academic articles on the history,

geography, and anthropology of the region, some of which were published in

English. As I detail in the next chapter, he and Recep Pasha also inserted themselves

into the ground level politics of African partition by mounting an unauthorized

challenge to French encroachment along the poorly-defined Algerian-Libyan border

in 1905–1906. Recep Pasha, who was widely respected within the officer corps and

CUP, ascended to the rank of War Minister after the revolution, but died of heart

failure within a month of taking office. With the restoration of the constitution, Cami

Baykurt was elected to parliament as the first representative from Fezzan, and later

served in the Grand National Assembly as an MP for Aydın.[77]

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within military and CUP activist circles. It is likely that he helped many of the *Şeref*
exiles escape Libya in this capacity. For a detailed (and glowing) obituary see
Nahum Slouschz, "Redjeb Pacha," *Revue du Monde Musulman* 6, no.9 (1908): 154–
157. İsmail Kemal was a high-profile civil servant and courtier with liberal leanings
who fell out of favor with Abdülhamid after a dispute over the Boer ("Transvaal")
War. He was supposed to precede Recep Pasha as Tripoli governor, but took asylum
on a British diplomat's yacht. His memoirs offer a fascinating glimpse into these
events and inform much of Hanioğlu's analysis. See Sommerville Story, ed., *The
Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London: Constable and Company, 1920), 299–329.
[77] Cami Baykurt's tenure saw a reorganization of Ghat's provincial administration.
The frontier outpost was briefly transformed from a *kaza* attached to Tripoli to a
sancak proper from 1903–1905. See Tahir Sezen, *Osmanlı Yer Adları* (Ankara: TC
Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2017), 278. For an example of his
scholarly work on southwestern Libya see Jamy Bey [Cami Bey], "Ghat and Its
Surroundings," *Geographical Journal* 34, no. 2 (1909): 171–173.

The veteran activist became close with controversial Turkish nationalist and feminist agitator Halide Edib during the postwar occupation of Istanbul and War of Independence. In the second volume of her memoirs, she describes him as "one of the real, old Turkish liberals," a man of "greater vision and liberalism than the Unionists in power" who often found himself marginalized and, even as a member of the opposition, disillusioned with the direction of the country. She concludes that his misfortune in politics was "due partly to his absolute lack of ambition both under the Unionist and [Kemalist] regimes, and partly to an abnormal sensitiveness…Very early the mystical side of his nature had led him to sympathize strongly with Gandhi's message of passive resistance." In that light, it is fitting that he spent much of the remainder of his adult life in self-imposed exile in Europe, perhaps reflecting critically on the strident political ideology advanced by Akçura, Ferit Tek, Sami Çölgeçen and so many of their contemporaries.[78]

Yet Cami's sorrowful final years as a man without a country obscure the fact that the tendency he represented, deeply contradictory as it was, played a key role in the parliamentary debates of the last Ottoman decade, as well as the transnational struggle over the post-imperial division of the region. Along with Akçura and Ferit Tek, Cami Baykurt was a co-founder of the National Constitution Party (*Milli Meşrutiyet Fırkası*, or MMF) the only openly Turkist political party active during the Second Constitutional Period.[79] Opposed both to the mainstream CUP right sector and the liberal cosmopolitan Party for Freedom and Accord (*Hürriyet ve İtilaf*

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[78] Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal: Being the Further Memoirs of Halide Edib* (London: Century, 1928), 77.
[79] Alp Yenen, "Envisioning Turco-Arab Co-Existence between Empire and Nationalism," *Die Welt des Islams* 61, no. 1 (2020): 72–112.

Fırkası), this important breakaway faction promoted a multinational federalist system of Turco-Arab dual monarchy—based on Habsburg and Swiss models—that proved highly influential from the Balkan defeats to the mid-1920s. Such ideas, sometimes including the abandonment of Istanbul and Thrace and relocation of the Ottoman capital to Iraq or the Levant (a measure noticeably absent from the MMF's program), are known to have gained currency in the provinces around this time, especially in Syria during the Great War. Less appreciated is the paradoxical reality that the leading Turanist activists of the day—Akçura, Ferit Tek, Ziya Gökalp, and fellow travellers such as Halide Edib—also supported bi-national rapprochement in the form of an Anatolia-Arabian state.

The apparent incongruity of these ideas—hardline, even racial, nationalism and support for the federalist position—is a reflection of teleological biases accumulated subsequently, not the picture on the ground. In the intellectual firmament of this explosive period, the Turco-Arab platform represented a foundational conservative impulse. As Alp Yenen notes, this was a conservatism rooted not in traditionalism or Islamic piety—most of its adherents were secular progressives—but rather in the conviction that the symbolic importance of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph and leader of a powerful empire justified the preservation of the system under the shared leadership of an Ottoman Muslim imperial nation. That the founding members of the MMF were all survivors of exile to the penal colony at Hamidian Libya was no accident: their experience in the Sahara was formative, and continued to frame their thinking about empire, colonialism,

139

nationhood, and Islamic solidarity even after the Ottoman collapse.[80] Indeed, the

dream of Muslim national federalism profoundly influenced anticolonial struggles

across Southwest Asia in the 1920s, conflicts which used to be considered in

isolation but are increasingly discussed as fronts in a single Afro-Eurasian conflict.[81]

As I show in the following chapter the Sanusiyya and its transregional networks

were central to this process, suggesting a larger optic, encompassing the Maghreb,

greater Sudan, and Northeast Africa, is needed to appreciate the entire panorama of

post-Ottoman territorial spatialization.

Conclusion

Investigating Hamidian exile from the perspective of Ottoman domestic

politics and international relations, this chapter has made three key claims. First, I

have argued that the draconian disciplinary practices of the era—reflecting the

economic, strategic, and diplomatic pressures of the Eastern Question and Scramble

for Africa as they brushed up against and further inflamed domestic political

tensions, especially in Istanbul—made the Libyan Sahara an unlikely nucleus of late

Ottoman contentious politics. The exiles who passed through Saharan Tripolitania

and Fezzan during the protracted state of emergency that lasted from the late 1870s

until the early 1900s represented every oppositional tendency in the Ottoman

world: Armenian revolutionaries were detained alongside some of the worst

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[80] Ibid and Hasan Kayalı, *Imperial Resilience: The Great War's End, Ottoman Longevity, and Incidental Nations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).
[81] Provence, *Last Ottoman Generation*; Laila Parsons, *The Commander: Fawzi al-Qawuqji and the Fight for Arab Independence 1914–1948* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2016).

perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, such as "Çerkez" Mehmed Reşid. In

Murzuk's desolate prison and the Tripoli fortress dungeon, Bulgarian anarchists

who dreamed of a stateless, classless future mingled with young officers and white-

collar civil servants who would constitute themselves as the advanced guard of a

revanchist and increasingly racialized Turkish nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s

(even if this did not always and forever preclude federalist dreams of Turco-Arab

rapprochement under the Ottoman Islamic banner).

Second, I have juxtaposed the experience of Unionists in the Hamidian Sahara

to the case of the Hemvend Kurds in order to highlight qualitative differences in the

enforcement of exile punishment for elite versus subaltern Ottomans. The Hamidian

regime considered Unionist professionals and military officers to be an essential

part of the Empire's institutional fabric and could therefore come to terms with

their incorrigible attitudes and thankless defiance. It demonstrated its flexibility by

commuting death sentences for treason and assigning CUP members to important

administrative positions through the practice of *ikamete memur*. By contrast, the

uprooting and forced settlement of the Hemvend Kurds was a crude tactic, the kind

reserved for superfluous outcasts, the remainder of the unbalanced equation of

Ottoman reconstruction.[82] These differences are inscribed in the very sources

available: while the gang of seventy-eight and other prominent CUP members left

richly-textured, if frequently self-aggrandizing, accounts of their daily struggles and

political awakenings, it is only possible to access the story of the Hemvend

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[82] Maier, *Leviathan 2.0*.

indirectly, through the official discourse of the Ottoman state and the sometimes fanciful accounts of European travelers.

Finally, I have emphasized that the Hamidian regime's autocratic caprice belies what was, in reality, a weak state coercive apparatus. There is no greater testament to this fact than the frequency of escape from Libyan exile, by elite and subaltern prisoners alike (*firar ettiler*, "they escaped," is perhaps the most common refrain in Yıldız Palace's Libyan *sürgün* files). The Hemvend Kurdish tribesmen Istanbul had gone to such extraordinary lengths to dispossess marched across two continents to reestablish themselves in Mosul, and boasted to anyone who would listen of the robberies they committed along the way. Sami Çölgeçen, sentenced to a century of internment for his revolutionary beliefs, taunted the governor of Fezzan as he departed for Lake Chad, Niger, Liverpool, and eventually Istanbul with a party of eight fellow political prisoners. Cami Bey and Recep Pasha, two of the most competent administrators to serve in provincial Libya at the twilight of the Ottoman Empire, nearly succeeded in launching a coup from Tripoli that threatened to bring a definitive end to Abdülhamid's thirty-year sultanate.

The construction of this penal colony with Ottoman characteristics, a crucial episode in the production of territorial Libya, also underlines the Sahara's importance for the broader history of late Ottoman statehood. In this chapter, I have only touched on the issues of colonialism, resistance, and the inter-imperial struggle indirectly, largely bracketing the increasingly aggressive behavior of European powers—above all the French and Italians—toward Istanbul and their efforts to negate the idea of Ottoman Africa during the Hamidian years and Second

Constitutional Period. I address these subjects, the rise of the Sanusiyya, and its

gradual evolution from borderland evangelism to anticolonial militancy in the

following pages.

III.

RELUCTANT MILITANTS: COLONIALISM, TERRITORY, AND RESISTANCE ON THE OTTOMAN-SAHARAN FRONTIER

<u>Introduction</u>

Thus far I have focused on the western regions of provincial Libya, Saharan Tripolitania and Fezzan, and the generally discordant relationship between the Ottoman frontier expansion regime and the Empire's tribal and nomadic populations. As I argued in chapter 1, the production of territorial state space in the Sahara was to a large extent defined by violent conflict between these two parties: an imperial liberal cartel that dreamed of transforming the province into a "pump for capital" and bridgehead to "Ottoman Africa," and rural communities disarmed, dispossessed, and displaced in the process. Furthermore, as the case of the Mosuli Kurdish Hemvend tribe attests, the application of the Libyan reconstruction model to other ostensibly peripheral areas created a fractal effect whereby the topological dimensions of rural pacification were replicated in a self-similar manner, at different geographical scales, across the Ottoman domains. Against this backdrop, the Hamidian regime's carceral practices made provincial Libya an important nexus of late imperial contentious politics, the site where domestic and geopolitical power struggles converged most visibly.

Yet it would be mistaken to conclude that the Ottoman state was intrinsically and irredeemably hostile to the mobile subject populations in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the contrary, as the aforementioned examples of the Ghuma bin Khalifa rebellion and Hemvend "bandits" demonstrate, the Sublime Porte and Yıldız Palace generally preferred negotiation, conciliation, and co-option as

measures of first resort in cases of rural unrest. Likewise, as Janet Klein, Reşat Kasaba, and other Ottoman social historians have shown, Istanbul frequently cultivated strategic partnerships with tribal and nomadic communities in the provinces in order to fulfill its own expansionist aims during the era of high imperialism. Turning toward the eastern Sahara, the present chapter explores one particularly durable and consequential alliance of this sort, the circumstances that compelled the ruling elite to instrumentalize and forge coalitions with "tribal power," and the sometimes-counterintuitive responses of local actors on the Ottoman-African frontier.

The Sanusi Order, or Sanusiyya, emerged in Ottoman Cyrenaica in the middle of the nineteenth century and quickly became the preeminent Sufi fraternity in North and Sudanic Africa. As the enigmatic brotherhood flourished, it captured the attention of various imperial powers jockeying for position in the Sahara, the Ottomans, British, French, and Italians. Though the Ottoman government first reacted skeptically, regarding the Sanusi as potential rivals, the two built an enduring partnership during the later years of Abdülhamid's reign, a Sanusi-Ottoman synthesis that outlasted the Hamidian regime and, in a certain respects, the Empire itself. Meanwhile, the Sanusiyya became the *bête noire* of colonial pundits in Paris and Rome, inspiring tremendous vitriol and increasingly sensational conspiracy theories. By the interwar years, this discourse—which I call Sanusi peril—saturated the North Atlantic public sphere, as provocateurs at both ends of the ocean prophesized an apocalyptic confrontation between the brotherhood and the forces of global colonialism.

Recent treatments have dispelled a number of myths concerning Sanusi history, but leave crucial ambiguities unresolved, due in part to their reliance on prefigured analytical categories. The dominant paradigm, which characterizes the Sanusi Order as a proto-state or anticolonial social movement, obfuscates the very issues of territory and resistance it attempts to clarify. Contrary to these static interpretations, I coin the term "reluctant militants" to describe the brotherhood's mercurial and contingent trajectory from Islamic social justice activism to armed struggle. Centering the Sanusi relationship to social and territorial space, I emphasize gradual changes in its organizational structure and mobilization tactics prompted at overlapping geographical scales by imperial competition.[1]

A primary tension of modern Libyan political history resides in the brotherhood's opposition to the spatial logic of colonial state building: a counterhegemonic, inherently *social* understanding of territorial relations, akin to rights on commons, versus a *territorial* view of social relations whose ultimate objective was spatial abstraction in the Lefebvrian sense.[2] In its early decades, the Sanusiyya focused its energies on proselytizing to the under-catechized frontiers of the Ottoman Sahara, establishing commercial and religious networks that crossed regional, imperial, and cultural boundaries. Until the turn of the twentieth century, the brotherhood's leaders preferred the kind of avoidance protest famously described by James Scott to open hostility, retreating into the desert whenever they

[1] Jonathan Wyrtzen, "Colonial War and the Production of Territorialized State Space in North Africa," in Søren Rud and Søren Ivarsson, eds., *Rethinking the Colonial State* (Bingley: Emerald, 2017), 151–173.
[2] Stuart Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 6 (2010): 799–817; Achille Mbembé, "At the Edge of the World: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 259–284.

felt pressure from Istanbul. Yet by the early 1900s, colonial propaganda became a self-fulfilling prophecy and the Sanusi reluctantly embraced armed militancy in response to French and Italian encirclement, a process I liken to enclosure. When the Ottoman framework abruptly disappeared in the aftermath of the Great War, the brotherhood continued fighting to regain their lost autonomy, waging guerilla campaigns against multiple European armies and participating in popular struggles as far away as Anatolia, frequently in collaboration with the Unionist Libya veterans discussed in the previous chapter.[3]

The Globalization of Sanusi Peril

Ideological mystifications trafficked between the brotherhood's colonial detractors and postcolonial boosters have generated significant confusion about the Sanusi Order and its relationship to the production of Libyan territorial space. Nationalist hagiographies celebrating its patriotic sacrifices broadly conform to a narrative authored by the most virulent anti-Sanusi critics. In this shared rendering, the intransigent, even xenophobic, Sanusiyya wittingly pursued anticolonial militancy from the moment of its inception, defending its proto-national territory against European penetration as an article of the faith—whether that faith was insular and reactionary or culturally authentic and emancipatory. A dispatch published simultaneously by London's *Daily News and Reader*, *The Times of India,* and *The Peking Gazette* in April 1916 gives a colorful description of the Sanusi

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[3] See Hasan Kayalı, *Imperial Resilience: The Great War's End, Ottoman Longevity, and Incidental Nations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Order's transregional influence and political ambition, which I will quote at length

because it is quite representative of informed opinion at the time:

> The Senussi...are the militant brotherhood whose prestige is paramount in
> Arab Africa. To this House of Contemplation [i.e. the de facto Sanusi
> "headquarters" in the Kufra, southern Cyrenaica]...at once college, hospice,
> and "Dar d'manah"—sanctuary—come pilgrims from all the countries
> around what the French captain Monteil has called the "gigantesque méfait"
> of the Sahara. Thence, fortified in the Faith, those return to their several
> regions— some to Borku, Bornu, Sokoto: others retrace the long road across
> British Nubia to Arabia, while many return to Morocco by way of Twat...The
> fraternity have [sic]...brought under the influence of Islam the tribes of the
> territories from Mayumba to Mombasa; and into all these peoples hostility to
> Rumi encroachment has been instilled. It is from the Kufra Zawiya and from
> other houses of the Senussi Order that unrest is spread throughout Islamic
> Africa, from Senegal to Suakin, from Melilla to Mozambique. We read of a
> revolt of tribes in British Nigeria; of the annihilation in Ubanghi of a party of
> Chasseurs; of the frustrated plans of an explorer. These things are done by
> Berber, Tuareg, Negro, and Nubian, hating each other as only savage tribes
> can hate, but all recognizing the supremacy of the Arab who has brought
> them into the field of the Prophet. *Fanaticism is the adhesive*."[4]

This stunning passage is revealing as it is amusing. The idiosyncratic use of

the Turkish "Rumi" as a synonym for European interlopers establishes the Ottoman

political context for the scene. The exaggerated imaginative geography—winding

from Iberian Morocco and Gabon across a continental desert to Sudan and the

Hijaz—betrays a grudging respect for the brotherhood's capacities of spiritual

persuasion. However, the outstanding quality of this reporting is its ominous,

unmistakably racist tone.[5] These sorts of tropes, which I refer to collectively as

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[4] Louise Peralta, "Rout of the Senussi: The Mother House," *Daily News and
Leader/Peking Gazette/Times of India*, 20 April 1916. My italics.
[5] Polemic this overwrought rarely appeared in the English press before 1914, and a
philo-Sanusi tradition runs through the Anglophone literature from Rosita Forbes,
The Secret of the Sahara: Kufara (New York: Cassell and Company, 1921) to E.E.

Sanusi Peril, were relatively new to the Anglophone press—such rhetoric intensified

and became more common after 1914, as the brotherhood threw its supported

behind the Central Powers in Egypt and Sudan—but took root in French and Italian

official circles, much sooner, as early as the 1860s. Almost from its establishment,

the Sanusi Order became a consuming fixation of colonial pundits, civilian

administrators, and military leaders in Paris, Rome, and their African colonies, who

regarded the Sanusi as an imminent threat to their ambitions. A discourse

identifying the brothers as anti-Christian zealots consumed by a desire to oust every

European from the Sahara originated in the rumor mills of sleepy desert outposts,

but gained enough traction in the ensuing years to become a pillar of colonial

policymaking. Such unfounded suspicions would have grim repercussions during

France's spectacularly violent conquest of northern Chad and, after 1911, the even

more rapacious Italian counterinsurgency in Cyrenaica.[6]

Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949).
Hostile contemporary sources include Arthur White, *From Sphinx to Oracle: Through the Libyan Desert to the Oasis of Jupiter Ammon* (London: Hurst, 1899); T.R. Threlfall, "Senussi and his Threatened Holy War: A Warning," *The Nineteenth Century and After*, March 1900.
[6] Jean-Louis Triaud, *La Légende noire de la Sanusiyya: une confrérie musulmane saharienne sous le regard français, 1840–1930* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1995); Knut Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge, Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi and his Brotherhood* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 6–13; Anna Baldinetti, "Italian Colonial Studies on the Sufi Brotherhoods in Libya" in Baldinetti, ed., *Modern and Contemporary Libya: Sources and Historiographies* (Rome: Istituto Italiano Per L'Africa e L'Oriente, 2003), 125–140; Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800–1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

PLOT TO ROUSE EASTERN ISLAM AGAINST BRITAIN

Nationalist Turks, Bolsheviki and German Communists in Conspiracy

Figure 1: Empire, racial pessimism, and conspiracy theories in the early interwar period. *Toronto Globe*, 18 June 1920.

Certain field officials such as Reginald Wingate, future Sirdar of the Egyptian Army and governor of Sudan, questioned the prevailing wisdom. In a telling 1893 communiqué Wingate, then a senior intelligence officer in Cairo, dismisses overdrawn French and Italian estimations of Sanusi power, humorously clarifying that although "almost all the Muslims of Central Africa regard [Second Grand Sanusi Muhammad al-Mahdi] as their Pope" and adopt his name as their epithet, these have "no more repute to be stamped 'Senussi' than the donkey ridden by Muhammad has to be stamped the Prophet Muhammad."[7] Wingate and other dissenting voices on

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[7] Sudan Archives, Durham University (SAD), Wingate to Everett, 12 May 1893, SAD 255/1/340-341; M.W. Daly, *The Sirdar: Sir Reginald Wingate and the British Empire in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997). German

the ground—primarily British officers, who were less inclined to trespass on Sanusi

positions than their French and Italian counterparts—found it absurd to hold the

brotherhood responsible for spontaneous indigenous resistance to European

scramblers. Russian-born Zionist and archaeologist Nahum Slouschz, who travelled

extensively in North and Central Africa in the early twentieth century, even gives an

admiring view, praising the Sanusiyya's "democratic spirit" and hospitality toward

Jewish merchants from Tripoli.[8]

Levelheaded voices such as these were lost in the cacophony of the Great

War and its aftermath, and Sanusi Peril reached its global apotheosis in the early

1920s. As the Paris Peace Conference ended, a mood of "racial pessimism" blanketed

North Atlantic intellectual life. Building on social Darwinist and eugenicist themes,

prominent social critics and public intellectuals described the foregoing cataclysm

as an act of racial suicide.[9] Many argued that the "white civil war" had shattered an

illusion of omnipotence already disrupted by the Italian defeat at Adwa and Japan's

victory over the Russian Empire in 1905.[10] Wilsonian liberalism and Leninist

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missionary Karl Kurr made verbatim observations two decades later. See John
Wright, *Libya, Chad, and the Central Sahara* (London: Hurst, 1989), 95.
[8] A 1905 Foreign Office report describes the Sanusiyya in anodyne terms—
"latitudinarian" in theology (tolerant of all *madhahib*) and "marked by a political
avoidance of civilised races, whether Turk or Frank." British National Archives
(BNA) FO 881/8596X. See also Nahum Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1927), 80–95.
[9] Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races,
1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 189–199.
[10] Gerald Horne, "Race from Power: US Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of
'White Supremacy,'" *Diplomatic History* 23, no.3 (1999): 437–461; Raymond Jonas,
The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire (Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 2011); Renée Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle
East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York:
Palgrave, 2014).

internationalism offered popular alternatives to the antebellum status quo, intensifying entropic tendencies in the colonial world-system.[11] Compounding matters, this period marked the apex of pan-Islamic activism, notably the Indian Khilafat movement and similar mobilizations in solidarity with incipient Turkish nationalism (Fig. 1).[12]

The intellectual firmament of the early interwar years produced the most caustic anti-Sanusi literature to date, a trend exemplified by the infamous Harvard-trained historian and white nationalist demagogue Lothrop Stoddard, the "leading apostle of Nordic racial supremacy in the United States."[13] In a pair of books published in 1920 and 1921, Stoddard locates the Sanusi Order at the center of a pan-Islamic conspiracy to liquidate "white civilization." He accuses the Sanusi of employing "Fabian tactics," studiously avoiding open confrontation with Europe's field armies while multiplying its forces annually during the Hajj. The brotherhood, he warns, intended to unite all of Muslim Africa, and eventually the entire Muslim world, in a "revived imamate" capable of overwhelming Islam's colonial masters.

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[11] See the editors' introduction to Vijay Prashad, et al., eds., *Liberate the Colonies! Communism and Colonial Freedom, 1917–1924* (New Delhi: Leftword, 2019), 13–23.
[12] Cemil Aydın, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 122–127; Musab Younis, "'United by Blood': Race and Transnationalism during the Belle Époque*," Nations and Nationalism* 23, no. 3 (2017): 484–504.
[13] Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 62–66; Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 100.

Thus conceived, Sanusi ascendance heralded the "triumph of colored races over the white man by elimination and absorption."[14]

Paradoxes of Territory and Resistance

Shorn of its racial and hyperbolic trappings, this nineteenth and twentieth-century discourse continues to influence historical understanding of the Sanusiyya. It reverberates most clearly in postcolonial nationalist historiography, which upholds the brotherhood as a *haraka*—an anticolonial social movement—in addition to a *tariqa*, a Sufi "lodge" or "path" to spiritual perfection. Critiques of the nationalist perspective have usefully subverted this characterization, emphasizing the Sanusi Order's contempt for the Sudanese Mahdists, disinterest in the Egyptian 'Urabi Movement, and refusal to aide German and Italian efforts to check the French advance in the Sahara, among other episodes.[15] Nevertheless, the stock image of the Sanusiyya as anticolonial freedom fighters, forever and always, has been difficult to dislodge.

A correlated, equally widespread discourse characterizes the brotherhood's loose transregional network as a de facto state. The Saharan frontiers of the Ottoman Empire and Central Sudanic Kingdoms, where the Sanusi Order was strongest, were among the most anarchic and "under-territorialized" environments

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[14] Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (New York: Scribner, 1920) and *The New World of Islam* (New York: Scribner, 1921), *passim*; Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[15] Ali Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (London: Routledge, 2005); John Voll, "Neo-Sufism: Reconsidered Again," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 42, no. 2–3 (2008): 314–330; Wright, *Libya, Chad, and the Central Sahara*, 93.

in the world around the turn of the twentieth century. Within this apparent power vacuum, the Sanusi arbitrated disputes, developed local economic structures, and provided services ranging from poor relief to everyday religious instruction. These activities have led many scholars to conclude that the Sanusi met the definition of a rudimentary state, whether measured against Weberian, Hegelian, or medieval Islamic criteria. This state fixation tracks rather consistently with the flagging credibility of the notion of the "stateless society." Once a prominent theme in the social sciences, above all political anthropology, it has become something of a taboo—"scandalous," in Judith Scheele's words—in recent years.[16] Even the common word "tribe" has fallen under suspicion: as Charles Maier notes, this "does not adequately summarize [indigenous] peoples' political existence, for they too had states or quasi states.[17] Yet, to paraphrase Scheele once more, false equivalence is a much a problem as exoticism, a demonstration of our inability to imagine "civilized" or "even just politically complex" forms of social organization that go beyond or are antithetical to the state and its abstract territorial space.[18]

Significantly, proponents of Sanusi "proto-statehood" have tended to foreclose all discussion of territory, which they consider an irrelevant metric for

[16] Judith Scheele, "Segmentation Versus Tyranny: Politics as Empirical Philosophy," in Scheele and Andrew Shyrock, eds., *The Scandal of Continuity in Middle East Anthropology: Form, Duration, Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 187–209.
[17] Charles Maier, *Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 4, citing Rudi Lindner, "What Was a Nomadic Tribe?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, no. 4 (1982): 689–711.
[18] Scheele, "Segmentation Versus Tyranny," especially 191 and 206.

evaluating the claim.[19] This a priori dismissal of territory itself constitutes a kind of "territorial trap," clouding historical understanding of the Sanusiyya and its role in the production of Libyan state space.[20] Held to the standard that materialized in nineteenth-century Europe and its settler colonies—whereby territoriality is synonymous above all with the construction of fixed political borders—Sanusi practices invariably fall short of the mark.[21] However, that judgment is predicated on the false assumption that the European experience constitutes a universal model rather than an outcome of contingent historical-geographical processes. The Sanusi Order never amounted to a state, embryonic or otherwise, nor was it constitutionally anti-territorial in the sense of favoring a "choreographed anarchism."[22] On the contrary, the brotherhood related to space primarily as a resource held in common, an instrument for the realization of Islamic social justice rather than a technology of political domination and demographic exclusion.[23]

This relational approach to political space is concretely inscribed in the architecture of the Sanusi *zawiya*, the cellular form of the nineteenth-century Saharan social formation (Fig. 2)*.* From the Arabic for "nook" (plural: *zawaya*), the term originally described the private chambers of a Christian monk, evolving over time to designate hostel for itinerant gnostics. The Sanusi Order built these

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[19] George Joffé, "Reflections on the Role of the Sanusi in the Central Sahara," *Journal of North African Studies* 1, no. 1 (1996): 25–41 makes this explicit.

[20] John Agnew, "The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory," *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1994): 53–80.

[21] Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 807–831.

[22] Scheele, "Segmentation Versus Tyranny," 207.

[23] Elden, "Land, Terrain, Territory."

complexes in clusters that typically featured a library, school, armory, workshop, law court, hospital, cemetery, granary, and devotional space.[24] The most elaborate of these *zawaya*, particularly the university center at Jaghbub, attracted students and seekers from across Islamic Africa. The brotherhood's stress on education was such that an Ottoman emissary who inquired about the weapons stash rumored to be held here was directed to a library of 8,000 handwritten manuscripts. Taking into account its popular mobile schools, the Sanusiyya claimed tens of thousands of students at its height. Still, the *zawaya* were heavily fortified constructions with impressive stockpiles of European rifles, the Sanusi trade in which became increasingly robust during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The brothers practiced basic combat drills alongside their agriculture, history, and Islamic science curriculum, and had no aversion to using all the tools at their disposal, literal and figurative.[25]

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[24] Sheila Blair, et al., "Zawiya," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
[25] 'Abd al-Jami al-'Alim, "The Sanusi Zawiyah System," in Fadhlalla Haeri, ed., *Leaves from a Sufi Journal* (Dorset: Element, 1988), 71; Wright, 102.
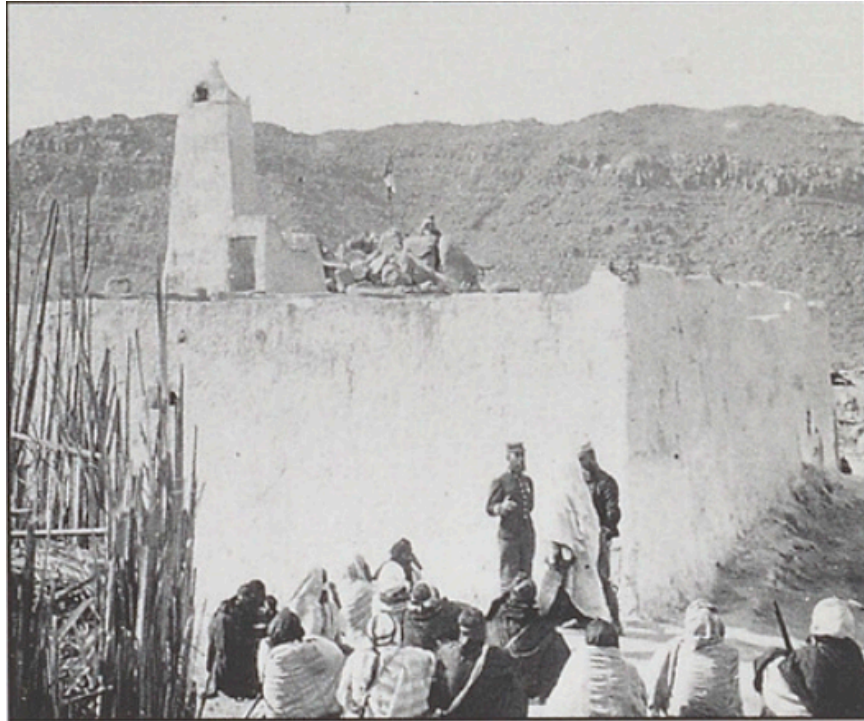
Figure 2: Sanusi zawiya at Djanet, 1912 Jacques de Person, *Un medecine au Sahara, 1912–1913*

Rooted in North African Islamic tradition, the *zawiya* model of community organization became increasingly common as Sanusi missionaries replicated the template across Central Africa and the eastern Sahara, each settlement constructed at a scale commensurate to the population it served (Fig 2). Though early Sanusi observers believed the location of these *zawaya* corresponded to preexisting tribal divisions, with individual tribes possessing their own exclusive franchises, recent scholarship has overturned that notion, revealing their strategic placement in the middle of such contested spaces. By positioning themselves between tribal confederacies and at critical intersections along northbound commercial routes and eastbound pilgrimage routes, the Sanusi were able to unite previously antagonistic social forces in a collective enterprise. This arrangement also gave the brothers

157

considerable discretion over the movement of individuals and commodities through

their social ecosystem. Employing an advanced courier system and an elaborate web

of checkpoints for cross-examining travelers, the Sanusi Order systematically

filtered out suspicious individuals. During the lifetime of the First Grand Sanusi

(d.1859), the brotherhood constructed sixty facilities of this kind. By the turn of the

twentieth century, that number had grown to 150, with the overall Sanusi following

swelling into the millions according to some estimates.[26]

The term *zawiya* encompasses multiple semantic registers, and can

metonymically represent an entire Sufi order with a meaning equivalent to *tariqa*.

That usage reflects the ideological and material centrality of the institution to the

Sanusi project. The brotherhood's abiding commitment throughout its history was

to establish an Islamic moral community uncorrupted by malign external influence.

To that end it was guided by the conviction that migration (*hijra*) is always

preferable to discord.[27] Over time, this approach yielded diminishing returns.

Violent confrontation became a self-fulfilling prophecy when colonial state-builders

descended on the brotherhood from every direction, though the reluctant militants

of the Sanusiyya were slow to comprehend the paradigm shift and insufficiently

prepared to respond. When the Sanusi finally began to engage the French, Italian,

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[26] Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 19–39; Matthew Ellis, *Desert Borderland: The Making of Modern Egypt and Libya* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 40–45.

[27] Jean-Louis Triaud: *Tchad 1900–1902: Une guerre franco-libyenne oubliée? Une confrérie musulmane, la Sanûsiyya, face à la France* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1988). For a nuanced analysis of the division of the world into "abodes" of war and peace (*dar al-Islam, dar al-harb*) in classical Islamic political thought see Ahmad Al-Dawoody, *The Islamic Law of War: Justifications and Regulations* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 92–105.

and British Empires militarily at the beginning of the twentieth century, the *zawaya*

acquired a new and more urgent significance. Designed to fulfill a pious, even

utopian aspiration, they were transfigured by circumstance into strategic assets for

the conduct of asymmetrical warfare.

Far from being anomalous, the brotherhood's ordering of political space and

tactical responses to external pressures reiterate a sociological pattern widespread

throughout the colonized world. Theorists of subaltern resistance have shown that

upland communities in the precolonial global south often protested burdensome tax

and conscription regimes by retreating to the hills. Avoidance and the withdrawal of

agricultural manpower remained the preferential resistance tactics across much of

Southeast Asia, to cite the best-known example, until the middle of the nineteenth

century, and only the arrival of colonial state-builders more capable and tenacious

than their dynastic predecessors forced such rural populations into armed

confrontation.[28] Though the social and physical landscapes described by scholars

such as James Scott and Michael Adas have little in common with the Ottoman

Sahara, the essentials of their framework map fairly consistently onto Sanusi

responses to outside interference from the 1840s to the 1930s.[29] As I demonstrate

in the remainder of the present chapter, this history unfolded in three distinct

phases: a period of collaboration and intermittent avoidance from the mid-

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[28] Michael Adas, "From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Precolonial and Colonial Southeast Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 2 (1981): 217–247; James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
[29] For illuminating commonalities with other corners of the Empire see Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011); Isa Blumi, *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (London: Routledge, 2011).

nineteenth century to the early Hamidian era; a transitional decade marked by French encirclement and the ascent of the Third Grand Sanusi, Ahmad al-Sharif, in 1902; and (3) the period of the Long Ottoman First World War, which began with the Italian invasion of Tripoli in 1911 and smoldered in the brotherhood's Cyrenaican heartland until the early 1930s.

Repertoires of Resistance: From Avoidance to Collaboration in the Eastern Sahara

In 1906, Roger Owen and George Walker, veterans respectively of Sudan and Somaliland, prepared a memorandum for the War Office cataloging the Sanusi Order's recent activities and political aspirations. After giving a chronology of its early years and a summary of its theology, their report declares that the brotherhood's arcane religious views are ultimately immaterial and of little interest to the British government. Instead, they claim, its remarkable qualities are the "spirit of colonization with which the founder imbued the sect," and its *political avoidance of civilized races, whether Turk or Frank*." The paradoxical mix of a colonial ethos and a policy of wary avoidance—underwritten by a "well-organized system of slave owning and dealing"—were the characteristic qualities of the Sanusi organization and together provided the key to understanding its motivations and behavior.[30]

The wayfaring life of Muhammad ibn 'Ali, the First Grand Sanusi, and the brotherhood's habit of uprooting and relocating their headquarters, lend some

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[30] My italics. BNA WO 106/1531. The language is identical to FO 881/8596X cited above. On Sanusi involvement in the slave trade see Wright, 81–111; Suzanne Miers, "Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues 1890–1939," *Slavery and Abolition* 19, no. 2 (1998): 16–37.

credence to this analysis. Sidi Muhammad was a scholar and religious virtuoso born

near the seaside town of Mustaghanem on Ottoman Algeria's Mediterranean coast.

He began his career as a student in local *zawaya* before pursuing university studies

in Fes and, in 1824, making the pilgrimage to the Hijaz, where he would remain for a

number of years.[31] The Grand Sanusi cultivated several important relationships

during his time in Mecca—notably with Muhammad al-Sharif, the future Sultan of

Wadai and benefactor of the Sanusi mission in Central Africa—and opened his first

zawiya on the outskirts of the city in the late 1830s. By the early years of the

following decade, he was on the move again, crossing the Red Sea, passing through

the oases of western Egypt, and settling finally in the Green Mountain region (*Jabal

al-Akhdar*), the fertile plateau south of Benghazi, in 1843. Together with the oasis

settlements around Kufra, this would become the center of the insurgent uprising

against Italian colonialism in the early twentieth century.[32]

The Sanusi leadership only remained at this home of its "mother *zawiya*"

briefly, absconding first to Jaghbub near the Egyptian oasis of Siwa in 1855, then to

the remote Kufra region of southern Cyrenaica in 1895. The rationale behind these

recurrent migrations remains unclear. While it is certain that pressure from local

rivals prompted the Grand Sanusi's flight from the Hijaz to North Africa in the first

instance, the picture thereafter becomes opaque. His return coincided with the

Ottoman provincialization process described in chapter 1, yet the reconstruction

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[31] Walker, who handles the section of the report dealing with the period 1822–1902, alleges the Grand Sanusi was prompted to leave Ottoman Algeria for Qarawiyyin University because "his so-called seditious views made him obnoxious to the authorities." BNA WO 106/1531
[32] Minawi, *Ottoman Scramble for Africa*, 30–39.

effort in Cyrenaica was noticeably less violent. Was the brotherhood already too powerful for the Istanbul to challenge meaningfully? Did its impeccable theological credentials shield it from the fate of Ghuma bin Khalifa and the Awlad Suleiman, the Empire's erstwhile local rivals in Tripolitania and Fezzan? If, on the other hand, a Sanusi-Ottoman partnership was an inevitable result of the economic, strategic, and legal-diplomatic struggle for continental ascendance, why did it take so long to come into effect? Perhaps, as Kemal Karpat suggests, the Grand Sanusi "believed the Ottoman political order was doomed to disintegrate and did not want to condemn his own brotherhood to death by harnessing it to the service of Istanbul."[33] If this was Sidi Muhammad's judgment, it did little to deter the factions courting him and his successors from the capital. British intelligence reports cite numerous overtures from Istanbul to the Sanusi, including a gift of ornate prayer books from Cairo. "True to the principle of avoidance," they claim, the Grand Sanusi respectfully accepted but generally "remained aloof" to Ottoman advances.[34] Conversely, other sources assert that by the reign of Abdülhamid the relationship between the brotherhood and the Ottoman administration was not only cordial but also warm, having become an important plank of the pan-Islamist agenda taking shape at Yıldız Palace. Selim Deringil has characterized this blossoming alliance as part of an Ottoman civilizing mission to "abate the savagery" of the Saharan Bedouin.[35]

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[33] Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43.
[34] BNA WO 106/1531.
[35] Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1998), 254; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 16–43. See also Alan Mikhail and Christine Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire

Rather than being mutually exclusive, the strategies of avoiding of more powerful actors and "colonizing" the Central African frontier complemented one another within the context of Ottoman geopolitics. Without question, the brotherhood studiously avoided open fights with Europeans before 1900. Nevertheless, the Sanusi Order—and other likeminded Sufi activists on the margins of Ottoman Africa—demonstrated certain elective affinities with the developmentalist thrust of the mid-nineteenth century and early Hamidian years. In the 1850s, the Sanusi focused on expanding their presence from Cyrenaica to Fezzan and Niger, and then doubled their evangelical efforts in Wadai and the western regions of Sudan after the move to Jaghbub (Fig. 3). Delivering a message of social renewal to these underserved populations without contesting sovereign Ottoman claims, the Sanusi effectively cultivated a base of support for a unified, multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire under a powerful sultan and Caliph as a counterweight to European hegemony.[36]

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and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 721–745.

[36] Isa Blumi, "Reorientating European Imperialism: How Ottomanism Went Global," *Die Welt Des Islams* 56, no. 3 (2016): 290–316. For a conflicting view see Michel Le Gall, "The Ottoman Government and the Sanusiyya: A Reappraisal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 1 (1989): 91–106. For a more general treatment see Brian Silverstein, "Sufism and Governmentality in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 29, no. 2 (2009): 171–185.

Figure 3: Sahara circa 1890. Library of Congress, Geography and Maps Division

The budding partnership acquired a newfound urgency during the acute

crisis of the 1880s, when the loss of Tunisia and Egypt and the diplomatic contest

over the African interior threatened permanently to sever longstanding Ottoman

ties to the continent. As Mostafa Minawi has shown, Ottoman statesmen reimagined

their empire as a contender in the African Scramble during and after the 1884 Berlin

Conference, acquiescing to European demands in the Maghreb while staking claims

of their own to the Tripolitanian "hinterland" around Lake Chad. The Hamidian

regime identified the Sanusi as natural partners in this enterprise, solidifying

relations between the two parties over the next decade. Though these maneuvers

failed to produce many tangible results—Istanbul largely abandoned the project by

164

the turn of the century, diverting its attention and resources to the Hijaz—they

prepared the ground for the Sanusi wars to follow, not least by supplying the

brotherhood with massive stockpiles of guns and ammunition.[37]

The Transitional Decade

The seemingly definitive diplomatic loss of Ottoman Africa and accession of

the Third Grand Sanusi, Ahmad al-Sharif, coincided with several other critical

developments that directly affected the outcome of subsequent events. A recent

global arms boom had supplied modern weapons to anticolonial movements across

the world. Throughout Africa, a turn from "set-piece" battles to guerilla tactics and

counterinsurgency was already underway, starting with the 1899–1902 Boer War.

Most significantly, French expeditionary forces were brutally advancing on Sanusi

positions in the Maghreb and Lake Chad basin from Algeria, Congo, and Gabon in an

effort to link their North and West African possessions to the territories that would

comprise French Equatorial Africa after January 1910.[38]

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[37] Minawi, *Ottoman Scramble for Africa*, 141–147. The Ottoman press covered these developments extensively, serializing the exploits of Ottoman emissary Sadik al-Mouayad Azmzade and his outreach to the Sanusiyya. See e.g. "Bir Osmanlı Zabitinin Afrika Sahra-yı Kebir'inde Seyahati ve Şeyh Senusi ile Mülakatı," *Servet-i Fünun*, 7 July 1898.

[38] Robert Crews, "Trafficking in Evil? The Global Arms Trade and the Politics of Disorder," in James Gelvin and Nile Green, eds., *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 121–142; Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914* (London: Routledge, 2006), 186; Bertrand Taithe, "Losing their Mind and their Nation? Mimicry, Scandal, and Colonial Violence in the Voulet-Chanoine Affair," in Martin Thomas, ed., *The French Colonial Mind: Violence, Military Encounters, and Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 26–51; British Stationary Office, *French Equatorial Africa* (London: Stationary Office, 1920).

In a March 1911 letter to 'Abdullah al-Kahhal, an infamous powerbroker in Cairo, Ahmad al-Sharif condemns France's recent petitions to the Ottoman government over Sanusi support for Sultan Muhammad Saleh of Wadai, lamenting that "the more we avoid this French foe...the more he follows us and does us harm without any cause on our part." Ahmad al-Sharif cites the siege of Kanem, the destruction of the *zawiya* at Ain Galaka in Tibesti, and the occupation of Djanet on the Algerian side of the border with Ghat in western Fezzan ("where the Turkish banner had been hoisted") as examples of French harassment, which he attributes simply to "religious enmity."[39]

His language is remarkably understated given the extreme violence involved in the colonization of northern Chad, a costly and protracted affair that saw the French butcher half the population of Wadai and decimate most of the rest of the country, beginning with the order's southernmost rampart at Bir Alali, Kanem from 1900 to 1902. Though the Sanusiyya mounted stubborn resistance to these incursions, leading bands of Awlad Sulaiman, Tubu, and Tuareg tribesmen, small mixed contingents of French and colonial soldiers ultimately overran them, leveling *zawaya* with heavy artillery and pillaging whatever remained. After their removal from Kanem in 1902, Sanusi forces decamped to the northern Chadian regions of Borkou, Ennedi, and Tibesti. They managed to hold out at Ain Galaka until 1913

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[39] BNA WO 106/14. See also Terence Walz, "Libya, the Trans-Saharan Trade of Egypt, and 'Abdallah al-Kahhal, 1880–1914," *Islamic Africa* 1, no. 1 (2010): 85–107. The relative scarcity, geographical diffusion, and unpredictable array of topics covered within original Sanusi correspondence necessitate a reliance on colonial and state archival sources, a perennial issue for Ottoman provincial histories. For background see Knut Vikør, "The Sanusi Letters: A Checklist," *Sudanic Africa* 3 (1992): 149–162.

when the French razed it to the ground, chaining survivors to the walls of the

zawiya, burning them alive, and leaving their corpses to rot in the sun.[40]

These developments did not go unnoticed in Istanbul. On the eve of the 1908

revolution, it appeared Ottoman interest in Lake Chad and the Sanusi Order might

be rekindled after dissipating around the turn of the century. More urgent from the

Ottoman perspective than the assaults on Kanem and Tibesti was the third episode

mentioned in the Sanusi-Kahhal correspondence, the Djanet Crisis of 1906. Together

with the nearby salt mining town of Bilma in northern Niger (which was mentioned

in the introduction and chapter 2), Djanet had fallen under France's sphere of

influence by the terms of an Anglo-French convention in 1899.[41] Paris failed to reify

the terms of that agreement with boots on the ground, and rumors began to

percolate through colonial circles that the Ottomans would dispatch a unit from

Fezzan to establish a presence in both areas. Istanbul consistently maintained

innocence, and in the case of Bilma no evidence suggests an active Ottoman

involvement. A French expedition marched from Agadez and occupied the oasis in

June.[42]

However, Sayyid Ahmad was correctly informed regarding Djanet. Seething

over Abdülhamid's apparent capitulation in the Sahara, Tripoli governor Matlı

Recep Pasha and his aide-de-camp Cami Baykurt— as I discussed in the previous

chapter, these were two of the most prominent Unionist dissidents serving as

[40] Wright, 112–125; Julien Brachet and Judith Scheele, *The Value of Disorder: Autonomy, Prosperity, and Plunder in the Chadian Sahara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 59–65.
[41] "The Partition of Africa," *Times of India*, 23 March 1899.
[42] Rouard de Card, *La France et la Turquie dans le Sahara oriental* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1910), 35–50

administrators in exile—assembled a provincial force to raise the Ottoman banner

over the Djanet *zawiya* in early July.[43] Their unilateral move caught Istanbul

unawares, and when confronted by his French counterpart, Grand Vizier Mehmed

Ferid tried to take advantage of the confusion by invoking the hinterland doctrine

and asserting Ottoman rights to the area. This in turn provoked a diplomatic row.

After an exchange of heated recriminations over the summer, Abdülhamid

begrudgingly agreed to restore the status quo in Djanet by imperial decree (*irade-i*

seniye) on 21 August. It is possible that the incidents in Bilma and Djanet, adding to a

decade of similar humiliations and setbacks, even prompted a semi-official riposte

in Tibesti, where Istanbul dispatched small garrisons to support the Sanusi the

following year.[44] Briefly reanimating the Ottoman-Sanusi partnership, these events

foreshadowed an unprecedented wave of clashes with European armies about to

erupt across the Sahara. Time had run out on the longstanding principle of

avoidance, and the Sanusi were no longer reluctant to respond to colonial violence

in kind.

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[43] Ibid. For the Ottoman government denials see Prime Minister's Ottoman Archive (BOA) BEO 2839/212909/1–3. On triangulation over Bilma, Djanet, and Tibesti see BOA HR SYS 1539/1/16–17; Ettore Rossi, "Per la storia della penetrazione turca nell'interno della Libia e per la questione dei suoi confine," *Oriente Moderno* 1, no.9 (1929): 153–167.

[44] BOA BEO 2897; BOA HR SYS 1541/2/171; É. Ardaillon, "L'oasis de Djanet," in *Renseignements coloniaux et documents: publiés par le Comité de l'Afrique française* (Paris: Le Comité, 1912), 321–337. See also Nevzat Artuç, *İttihat ve Terakki'nin İttihad-ı İslam Siyaseti Çerçevesinde İttihatçı-Senusi İlişkileri (1908–1918)* (Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2013), 69; M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Knut Vikør, "An Episode of Saharan Rivalry: The French Occupation of Kawar, 1906," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18, no. 4 (1985): 699–715. When Istanbul quit the region permanently after 1912 France added insult to injury by converting the Djanet *zawiya* into a barrack.

The Long War

Coming on the heels of a string of internal crises, the Italian invasion of

Ottoman Libya in September 1911 extinguished any of the 1908 revolution's

vestigial democratic potential, underscored Istanbul's weakness, ignited the Balkan

powder keg, and signaled the onset of the Ottoman First World War.[45] The long-

anticipated move, a transparent bid for a "place in the sun" by an upstart colonial

power, was widely condemned internationally despite the tacit approval of Britain

and France.[46] Though Istanbul had little hope of maintaining this last remaining

vestige of Ottoman Africa, the CUP government sent a clandestine force of "self-

sacrificing officers," including Enver Pasha, Mustafa Kemal, and other future

luminaries, to organize Sanusi irregulars. While they were able to hold Italian lines

to the coast for over a year, Italy retaliated severely, occupying the Dodecanese and

drowning an Ottoman fleet in Beirut's harbor. Turmoil in Montenegro compelled the

Ottoman leadership back to the capital by October 1912, and Istanbul sued for peace

the same month, formally abandoning Libya to Italy at Ouchy near Lausanne.[47]

Shortly after the Ottoman officers arrived, Ahmad al-Sharif issued a jihad

proclamation, the text of which was inscribed on silk banners and carried

throughout the region to inspire local resistance. His message enjoins adherents not

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[45] Mustafa Aksakal, "The Ottoman Empire," in Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, eds., *Empires at War, 1911–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17–33.
[46] Nicola Labanca, *La guerra italiana per la Libia, 1911–1931* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2012).
[47] Andrew Mango, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey* (New York: Overlook, 1999), 101–111; Abdülgani Seni Yurtman, *Beyrut Bombardımanı: Trablusgarb Harbi Esnasında İtalyanlar Tarafından İka Edilmiş Bir Şenia-yı Tarihiye* (Beirut: Vilayet Matbaası, 1916). The Ouchy agreement granted Libya nominal "autonomy."

to fear the better-equipped, vastly larger Italian force and warns of the divine

punishments awaiting those who pursue a "temporizing" policy. Crucially, Sayyid

Ahmad presses no specific territorial claims, emphasizing instead the duty to

combat the enemies of Islam wherever they trespass. Accordingly, Sanusi guerillas

continued to frustrate Italy long after the Ottoman retreat while harassing French

armies to the south and opening a third front against Britain in western Egypt and

Darfur.[48]

Figure 4: Sanusi irregulars march against British forces in Egypt, 1915. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

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[48] Abdul-Hadi Hairi, "The Responses of Libyans and Iranians to Imperialism as Reflected in Two Documents," *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 130, no. 2 (1980): 372–392; André Salifou, "Kaoucen et le siège d'Agadès, 1916-1917," *Journal des Africanistes* 42, no. 2 (1972): 193–195.

In December 1915 a Sanusi contingent under the command of Jafar al-Askari and Enver's brother, Nuri Bey, mounted an offensive sometimes characterized as the "reverse Arab revolt," seizing the Egyptian coastal enclave of Sallum and a chain of oases to its south at the behest of the Ottoman and German leadership (Fig. 4). The attack came at a desperate moment for Britain. With its forces already pinned down in Gallipoli and Iraq, it now risked losing access to the subcontinent through Suez. After a series of embarrassing defeats, British and colonial soldiers finally drove the brotherhood back into Cyrenaica in February, capturing Jafar Pasha, who subsequently defected to the Sharifian cause, and narrowly salvaging their strategic position at Marsa Matruh.[49] The dust had barely settled on this fiasco when British interests came under threat from a powerful Sanusi ally to the south, Sultan 'Ali Dinar of Darfur.

'Ali Dinar, a former prisoner of the Mahdists at Omdurman, established one of the last independent African sultanates from al-Fashir in 1899 and paid symbolic tribute to the Anglo-Egyptian government until relations between the parties soured with the outbreak of the war. Surviving documents in Khartoum testify to a longstanding partnership between Darfur and the Sanusiyya who, along with the Ottomans, pressured the sultan to revolt in the name of Islamic solidarity. British hysteria over the situation mounted gradually until 1916, when Sirdar Wingate

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[49] Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Basic, 2016), 237–252; John Morrow, *The Great War: An Imperial History* (London: Routledge, 2004), 97; Jafar al-Askari, *A Soldier's Story: From Ottoman Rule to Independent Iraq: The Memoirs of Jafar al-Aksari* (London: Arabian, 2003). Incredibly, Sanusi guerillas managed to rout Italian forces at Qasr Abu Hadi almost simultaneously, delivering Rome its worst defeat since Adwa. See Angelo Del Boca, *La disfatta di Gasr bu Hàdi: 1915: il colonnello Miani e il più grande disastro dell'Italia coloniale* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004).

finally dispatched an Egyptian army regiment for a showdown at al-Fashir. Despite

the melodrama leading up to the battle, Anglo-Egyptian soldiers easily destroyed the

Darfur resistance, mowing down thousands with modern artillery and airstrikes

while sustaining few or no casualties. This ignominious spectacle marked the last

stand of Ottoman-sponsored indigenous political autonomy in Central Africa, a

project whose origins stretched back to the 1840s, as I described in chapter 1.[50]

By autumn 1918, it seemed the Ottoman-Sanusi relationship was exhausted.

When Enver departed Tobruk for Alexandria in December 1912, he concocted an

elaborate ruse to avoid Sanusi detection, shaving his iconic mustache and assuming

the identity of a German count. It appeared the Ottoman government would vacate

Libya in similarly degraded fashion, ceding it to Italy for the second time in a decade.

Sayyid Ahmad meanwhile abdicated in favor of his cousin Idris, who pursued vis-à-

vis the Entente precisely the "temporizing" policy the former had inveighed against,

briefly to rule an independent emirate before the Italian reconquest of the Libyan

interior began in 1922–1923.[51] Ironically, it was at this apparent nadir that the

precarious alliance became more consequential for outcomes in Cyrenaica—and the

Ottoman Anatolian heartland—than ever before.

Departing for Vienna by submarine in August 1918, Sayyid Ahmad publicly

resurfaced in Istanbul as an Ottoman pensioner. After participating in the

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[50] In the event the Sanusi did more harm than good, diverting ammunition intended for 'Ali Dinar to their own struggles in Cyrenaica. See Jay Spaulding and Lidwien Kapteijns, *An Islamic Alliance: Ali Dinar and the Sanusiyya, 1906–1916* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994); BNA FO 141/426; "Fighting in Central Africa," *Irish Times*, 27 May 1916.

[51] BNA PRO 30/57/43–46; Eileen Ryan, *Religion as Resistance: Negotiating Authority in Italian Libya* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For Enver's personal account see Enver Pasha, *Enver Paşa'nın Trablusgarp Günlüğü* (Istanbul: T&K, 2015).

coronation of Sultan Mehmed VI, the government provided him a residence in Bursa. Here he promptly renewed his partnership with Mustafa Kemal, just as the nationalist movement began to materialize.[52] Interviewing the future Atatürk at his Çankaya residence in 1922, journalist Ahmet Yalman found Libyan keepsakes prominently displayed throughout the leader's office, including a pair of decorative Qur'ans and Sayyid Ahmad's ceremonial sword. While Kemalist historiography still upholds an idealized notion of the Turkish Republic's secular origins, the Anatolian movement largely articulated its grievances using a "vocabulary of Muslim nationalism" during the Independence War, regarding as its natural constituency the "Ottoman Muslim nation."[53] In this transitory milieu, Ahmad al-Sharif assumed the significant role of General Preacher for the East (upon his resignation in 1923 the post was offered to Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, who declined). During his stay in Bursa, he received 'Abbas Hilmi II—who hoped to obtain Sanusi backing for a campaign to retake the Egyptian throne—and lobbied England to block Italy's occupation of Jaghbub, asking that it be annexed instead to British-controlled Siwa. He then traveled throughout Anatolia as a revolutionary propagandist—to Kayseri, Cilicia, and Kurdistan—organized a 1921 Islamic conference in Sivas, and (as he later disclosed to the Foreign Office) came under pressure from Mustafa Kemal to lead a Kurdish army to recapture Mosul from Britain.[54]

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[52] BNA CAB 44/14; BOA HR SYS 2345/45; BOA BEO 4542/340612; BOA DH İ UM 19/1.

[53] Marc Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 44; Erik Zürcher, "The Vocabulary of Muslim Nationalism," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 137, no. 1 (2009): 81–92.

[54] BNA CAB 44/14

Figure 5: Postcard depicting Mustafa Kemal and Ahmad al-Sanusi as Muslim heroes alongside Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi

Ahmad al-Sharif's position in Turkey became intolerable after he rebuffed Atatürk's offer of the Caliphate. Following its abolition in 1924, he departed for the Hijaz via Adana and Damascus, hoping to return to Cyrenaica through Sudan. Acquiescing to Italian demands, London prevented him from doing so until his death in 1933.[55] Nevertheless, his ties to Ankara continued to produce dividends in Libya: as late as 1926 the Kemalist government—which had just outlawed Sufi fraternities within its own borders—continued to send arms, ammunition, and military attachés to reinforce Sanusi rebels in the throes of an increasingly vicious Italian

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[55] BNA CAB 44/14; Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Odile Moreau, "Echoes of National Liberation: Turkey Viewed from the Maghrib in the 1920s," *Journal of North African Studies* 8, no. 1 (2003): 59–71; Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012).

counterinsurgency, infuriating Italian diplomats, as well as Mussolini himself.[56] With

the rest of the brotherhood's allies in Central and Sudanic Africa decimated, this was

a critical lifeline. By the time of the decisive Italian victory at Kufra in 1931, the

connection between the Sanusiyya and the Anatolian movement had cemented itself

in the broad post-Ottoman cultural imagination (Fig. 5).

Conclusion

The Ottoman collapse deprived the Sanusiyya of the only political frame of

reference it had ever known.[57] Nevertheless, Ahmad al-Sharif continued his

revolutionary ministry in exile, while the insurgents bearing his name thwarted

Italy's forceful unification of territorial Libya for nearly a decade. The Sanusi

commitment to Islamic solidarity and the utopian aspiration embodied in the *zawiya*

endured, even absent the Ottoman mooring. Emerging at a moment of great political

turmoil, when the Ottoman reconstruction effort in provincial Libya was hitting its

stride, the Sanusi Order astutely maintained a conciliatory posture, delivering a

message of social cohesion and reform to the Saharan frontier and eventually

establishing itself as a pillar of Istanbul's forward policy in Central Africa.

The brotherhood pursued these objectives peacefully for over half a century,

retreating into the desert whenever the possibility of conflict arose. As I have

argued, the Sanusiyya embraced armed militancy only reluctantly and as a function

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[56] Ministero degli Affari Esteri, ed., *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, 1923–1935 (Rome: Libreria dello stato, 1990), *passim*; "Turks Aid Tripoli Revolt: Military Instructors to Train Senussi Troops against Italy," *Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 1925.
[57] This was the nearly universal post-Ottoman condition. See Kayalı, *Imperial Resilience*; Provence, *Last Ottoman Generation*.

of overwhelming pressure in the years leading up to the First World War. Sanusi

Peril became a self-fulfilling prophecy as European encirclement compelled the

brotherhood to adopt the role it had been accorded in colonial propaganda since the

1860s. As its centennial approached, the Sanusi Order confronted a uniquely

ruthless enemy in Italian Fascism. Its extirpation would be among the most

gruesome in the annals of colonial history, comparable to the worst mass atrocities

of the period.[58]

This chapter has drawn on political geography and theories of subaltern

resistance to delineate the Sanusi Order's responses to colonial state builders and

explore the consequences of those entanglements for the Ottoman Empire, Saharan

Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Sanusiyya preserved a "plastic sense of

territory, of land that was theirs but with an ill-defined border," which I have

likened to rights on commons, during the throes of global and regional

transformations that made such projects nearly impossible to sustain.[59] The colonial

enclosure of its Saharan commons prompted its turn to armed struggle, a process

driven more by desperation than ideology. Indigenous peoples across much of the

world encountered similar conditions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century,

from Central Asia to the Black Hills of South Dakota.

In a panoramic revisionist account of enclosure that tracks the process from

privatization and land improvement schemes in early modern England through the

eradication of Amerindian landscapes to Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine,

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[58] Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*; Nicola Labanca, "Colonial Rule, Colonial Repression, and War Crimes in the Italian Colonies," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 300–313.
[59] Maier, *Leviathan 2.0*, 305.

Gary Fields argues that cartographic, legal, and architectural "technologies of force" have played a determining role in the global history of territorial spatialization.[60] As I argue in the next and final chapter, cartography was more a *consequence* of enclosure in the post-Ottoman Sahara rather than its proximate cause. Zooming in on Cyrenaica during the twenty-year Sanusi-led revolt against Italian colonialism, I examine Italian counterinsurgency doctrine as it evolved in response to Ottoman imperial resilience, Sanusi mobility, and the unique challenges of provincial Libya's militarized natural environment. The catastrophic success of the fascist program to dominate the region's area, perimeter, and volume made possible the legal-political and techno-scientific representation of colonial state space.

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[60] Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

IV.

ITALIAN COLONIALISM AND THE GEOMETERY OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

<u>Introduction</u>

In autumn 1920, British globetrotter Rosita Forbes and Egyptian polymath

Ahmed Hassanein began a winding journey from the Eastern English Fenlands to

the Sanusi capital of Kufra, deep in the Cyrenaican interior. The intrepid pair

stopped first in Milan, where they hoped to obtain a handwritten affidavit from an

old confidant, Emir Faisal. They believed the Hashemite leader, just ousted from

Damascus and living in sumptuous exile on Lake Como, might testify to another

British client, Idris al-Sanusi, that their intentions in his country were pure (Forbes

in particular had convinced herself this Faisali note would act as her passport

through Eastern Sahara). Alas, the Milanese leg of their itinerary coincided with

nationwide riots at the height of the *Biennio Rosso*, Italy's so-called "Red Years," and

the duo were ground to an abrupt halt at a railway station besieged by

revolutionary socialists. After their bags were confiscated and locked inside a

commandeered wagon, an exasperated Forbes appealed to a bull-necked stranger

with a "curious, lidless stare" and a menacing entourage who "followed him as if he

were the Baptist."[1]

With the swing of an axe, he broke open the compartment and retrieved their

luggage before introducing himself as Benito Mussolini, editor of *Il Popolo d'Italia*,

the movement organ of the Italian extreme right. As they began chatting over cheap

tobacco and tea, he took amused interest in her fanciful scheme to enter Kufra

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[1] Rosita Forbes, *Gypsy in the Sun* (London: Cassell, 1944), 22–47 and 190–198.

disguised as a widowed Egyptian pilgrim, "Sitt Khadija." He was dismissive, taunting

that "some man would make love to [her] in Benghazi, and that would be the end of

it." When they met again nearly a decade later, Forbes was a best-selling author

whose account of her exploits in the Sahara had made her an international celebrity

at the expense of Hassanein, the prime mover behind the trek through inner

Cyrenaica. During a layover in Rome, Mussolini invited her for a private rendezvous

at Palazzo Venezia, where she found him stockier than before, preoccupied with his

African colonies, and exhibiting signs of megalomania. After apologizing for his

earlier condescension, he sardonically thanked her for mapping the route from the

Mediterranean to Kufra. Soon, he exclaimed, he would "send an army in her steps."

Unfazed, she replied that his war machine would "never get over the dunes." This

time it was Forbes who underestimated the other's tenacity. In January 1931, Italian

tank and aerial divisions supported by colonial troops recruited from the Eritrean

Highlands overran the last Sanusi citadel, dispersing hundreds of refugees into the

Egyptian desert and south toward Tibesti in the penultimate act of a twenty-year

bloodletting.[2]

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[2] For the two principle accounts of the Kufra expedition see Rosita Forbes, *The Secret of the Sahara: Kufara* (New York: Cassell, 1921) and Ahmed Hassanein, *The Lost Oases* (New York: Century, 1925). Hassanein was an Oxford educated diplomat, Olympic fencer, and courtier to the Egyptian monarchy. Following the Kufra expedition, which would have been impossible without his native Arabic fluency and contacts within the Italian government and Sanusiyya, he also became a decorated member of the Royal Geographical Society, as did Forbes. For an earlier attempt to map the route to Kufra based on data from an alleged Sanusi informant see W.J.H. King, "The Libyan Desert from Native Information," *Geographical Journal* 42, no.3 (1913): 277–283. For background on Faisal's time on Lake Como see Ali Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 303–313. For more on British-Italian sponsorship of Idris al-Sanusi around this time see BNA FO 373/6/16 (1919) and FO 141/757/7 (1919). For more on Left mobilizations in Italy

In many ways this little-known and largely forgotten episode typifies the

synthesis of geographical knowledge and imperial power across the long nineteenth

century, a period in the discipline's formation memorably eulogized by Joseph Conrad

as the era of "geography militant."[3] In a widely cited jeremiad published in *National

Geographic* four years after the Forbes expedition reached Kufra, Conrad describes

geography's maturation from a fabulist discourse to an objective, scientific episteme

dominated by larger-than-life personalities in the mold of James Cook and David

Livingstone. Turning to his own contemporaries, he laments that the missionary

fervor and empirical rigor that defined Victorian geographical culture were dissolving

into complacent triumphalism. As colonial empires busily colorized the few remaining

blank spaces on the map, Conrad predicted the ineffectual tourist would replace the

lettered soldier-explorer as geography's emblematic figure.[4]

His proclamation of the death of geography militant appears premature in

hindsight, a romantic narrative of decline that papered over the field's internal

contradictions while egregiously underrating its symbiotic attachment to the

colonial enterprise. Despite his expectations, geography in its multiple protean

guises continued to act as the tip of the imperial spear, much as it had during the

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after the First World War see Paul Corner, "The Road to Fascism: An Italian Sonderweg?" *Contemporary European History* 11, no. 2 (2002): 273–295.

[3] Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 1–23; 199–219. Over the last thirty years, geographers and historians have assembled a searing indictment of the discipline's colonial legacy. In addition to Driver see Robin Butlin, *Geographies of Empire: European Empires and Colonies c.1880–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Morag Bell, et al., eds., *Geography and Imperialism, 1820–1940* (Manchester University Press, 1995); Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, eds., *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[4] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993) is the classic statement on Conrad.

lifetimes of Cook and Livingstone, for the remainder of the twentieth century. In the

early decades of the twenty-first, guild geography appears to have entered a new

phase reminiscent of this sordid and not-too-distant history, with military-

sponsored projects to map the human terrain of contemporary battlefields

heralding the return of vulgar empiricism in the service of empire (a phenomenon

Joel Wainwright appropriately labels "geography counterinsurgent").[5]

The following account of Italy's twenty-year Libyan counterinsurgency

appropriates Wainwright's formulation while standing it on its head.[6] Colonial

geography's role in encouraging, facilitating, and documenting the European

conquest of the Middle East and Maghreb—including the production of such world-

regional categories in the first instance—has been critiqued extensively.[7] Likewise,

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[5] Joel Wainwright, *Geopiracy: Oaxaca, Militant Empiricism, and Geographical Thought* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 40–66. Wainwright's title refers to the Bowman expeditions, a series of US Army-funded projects to collect and map sociocultural data on "operational environments" across the global south. The indigenous subjects of Bowman's *México Indígena* project in Oaxaca describe this research, to which they consented under false pretenses, as "geopiracy."

[6] It is important to distinguish scorched-earth, turn-of-the-century counterinsurgencies—Charles Caldwell famously labeled these "small wars" because they pitted mid-sized European armies against irregular bands of "savages and semi-civilized races"—from "COIN," the current liberal-humanitarian counterrevolutionary warfare paradigm, which seeks to "achieve an acceptable level of security" by winning civilian "hearts and minds." If these represent two poles on a continuum, the Libyan experience of Italian colonialism sits at the extreme end, marking the apotheosis of the former tendency. See Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Hannah Gurman, ed., *Hearts and Minds: A People's History of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013).

[7] Abdelmajid Hannoum, *The Invention of the Maghreb: Between Africa and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Michael Bonine, et al., eds., *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). For detailed country studies see e.g. Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named*

historians have documented the operational history of the Libyan war in exhaustive

detail, especially in Italy. Instead of recapitulating these well-worn themes, this

chapter embeds the military history of Italian colonization within a more expansive

narrative about the spatial tactics of empire and their epistemic consequences. In

the course of their campaign to pacify Ottoman Libya and fuse its three distinctive

regions into a contiguous territorial state, the architects of Italian

counterrevolutionary strategy—Pietro Badoglio, Emilio De Bono, and above all

Rodolfo Graziani—emerged as an organic (in the Gramscian sense) vanguard of

geographical innovation.[8] Italian counterinsurgency doctrine encompassed an array

of practices aimed at *producing the territorial space in question*, mainly abrogating

Ottoman and indigenous conceptions of place. In this tangible sense, the

counterinsurgent-as-geographer prepared the way for the geographer-as-field-

scientist, establishing the conditions of possibility for the surveying, mapping,

quantifying, and cataloguing of territorial Libya.[9]

The endgame of Italian imperialism, in both its liberal and fascist iterations,

was to impose a Euclidean rationality on the former Ottoman provinces, to

overwrite the mediated space of the *vilayet* and Sanusi commons with the

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Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
[8] On Gramsci's chronically misconstrued notion of organic intellectuals—this non-normative category refers specifically to an intelligentsia that *organizes*, without respect to class origins or political sympathies—see Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 233–272.
[9] David Atkinson, "Geographical Knowledge and Scientific Survey in the Construction of Italian Libya," *Modern Italy* 8, no. 1 (2003): 9–29 and "The Politics of Geography and the Italian Occupation of Libya," *Libyan Studies* 27 (1996): 71–84.

reticulated gridlines of the colonial state.[10] As the foregoing chapter demonstrated, the conceit that local societies can be unilaterally reconfigured by fiats issued in distant capitals radically diminishes the political agency of the colonized. On the contrary, the production and ordering of Libyan state territorial space was a dialectical process in which insurgents and counterinsurgents were implicated equally as agents of historical and geographical transformation.[11] In Ottoman Libya, the Italians encountered a complex ecology of preexisting solidarities and social antagonisms, becoming new actors in a political field already crowded with players, including the Unionist regime (as primus inter pares) and the Sanusiyya. Italy's violent encounter with these factions, and the entanglement of their imaginative geographies and horizons of political expectation, defined the everyday course of the war.

Italian leaders wagered they could simplify the multifaceted problem of colonial state formation by reducing it to a straightforward geometric equation: sovereign authority, Graziani and company reasoned, could elegantly be expressed in terms of area, perimeter, and volume. During her sparring match with Mussolini, Rosita Forbes insisted such an undertaking would face colossal, perhaps insurmountable logistical hurdles. This was hardly a clairvoyant objection. If

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[10] Appropriately enough, *reticolato* also signifies a "barrier" or "fence" in Italian On mediated (relative, relational, etc.) versus absolute space see chapter 1, as well as Alexis Wick, *The Red Sea: In Search of Lost Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[11] Fouad Makki, "Imperial Fantasies, Colonial Realities: Contesting Power and Culture in Italian Eritrea," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 4 (2008): 735–754; Jonathan Wyrtzen, "Colonial War and the Production of Territorialized State Space in North Africa," in Søren Rud and Søren Ivarsson, eds., *Rethinking the Colonial State* (Bingley: Emerald, 2017), 151–173.

anything, the grinding attrition of the previous two decades had conclusively demonstrated that "geometric laws cannot satisfactorily answer geographic questions"—least of all in the Cyrenaican desert—though the Italian high command, perhaps due to lingering bitterness over experiences in East Africa earlier in their careers, obstinately refused to digest the lesson.[12]

Three spatial constraints operating at three distinct, but continuous scales—transimperial, regional, and local—overdetermined the Italian approach to counterrevolutionary warfare in the twenty-year campaign against the Sanusiyya. First, as noted, was the Unionist factor. This was especially critical before the First World War, witnessed by the Empire's ability to channel aid to Sanusi fighters from around the greater Middle East and wider Muslim world, as well as the impressive performance of the Ottoman volunteer officers who smuggled themselves across Anglo-Egyptian lines to organize the asymmetrical defense of the provinces during the first phase of colonization.[13] Even at the height of the struggle against the Entente in the Dardanelles from February 1915 to January 1916, Istanbul was able to resupply the Sanusiyya through ratlines operated by provincial administration officials in Antalya and Muğla.[14] Moreover, as Ahmad al-Sanusi's residency in

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[12] Robert Sack, "Geography, Geometry, and Explanation," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62, no.1 (1972): 61–78.
[13] For background on the CUP's clandestine activities see Ahmet Tetik, *Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Umur-ı Şarkıyye Dairesi) Tarihi Cilt I: 1914–1916* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2019); Odile Moreau, "Aref Taher Bey: An Ottoman Military Instructor Bridging the Maghreb and the Ottoman Mediterranean," in Moreau et al., eds., *Subversives and Mavericks in the Muslim Mediterranean: A Subaltern History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 57–78; Polat Safi, "History in the Trench: The Ottoman Special Organization – Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa Literature." *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 1 (2012): 89-106.
[14] BOA DH ŞFR 53/288 (1915)

Eastern Anatolia attests, the Ottoman institutional legacy proved surprisingly resilient into the interwar period and continued to influence events in the former Libyan provinces into the late 1920s. During the first years of the Turkish Republic, Rome constantly groused that exiled activists from Tripoli and Benghazi were using Istanbul as a base to form political action committees, that a libelous Turkish press was inflaming Muslim public opinion against the Italian government, and that the few remaining Italian nationals in Anatolia were being unfairly retaliated against for perceived injustices in North Africa.[15]

Second and more acutely troublesome for Graziani, who inherited military responsibility for the colonies after the near simultaneous fall of the Ottoman state and ascent of Italian fascism, was the issue of Bedouin mobility. This was an especially thorny problem in Cyrenaica and Fezzan, where the Sanusiyya used proto-guerilla tactics to devastating effect. Organizing themselves into furtive raiding parties (*duwr,* pl. *adwar*), lightly equipped Sanusi insurgents relied on their superior speed and intimate familiarity with the landscape to harass Italian positions, moving "like cyclones," stealing arms and ammunition, and dissolving into the desert before any effective counterattack could be mounted against them. The Italian political class naively assumed the forces they sent to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in September 1911 would be greeted as liberators. Within a month they were unceremoniously disabused of this illusion, as their inland progress stalled

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[15] BOA HR İM 21/76 (1923). It also accused Turkish citizens of various intrigues, as in the case of a certain Omar Pasha, who was arrested by Italian Intelligence along with his son and brother in 1924 and received an eleven year prison sentence for acting as a Sanusi agent while holding the office of Counselor to the Italian Government of Italian Libya. See "Italy Convicts Arab Chief: Sentences of Omar Pasha and Son to Long Term for Plots," *New York Times*, 20 February 1924.

and urban populations spontaneously rebelled against the occupation. Supported by the mass of the society, built on the foundation of the *zawiya* network, and nourished by a considerable resource base across the Sahara and Eastern Mediterranean, the Sanusiyya's "nomadic strategies" proved impossible to counter for most of the ensuing decade, particularly in the brotherhood's strongholds along the frontiers of Egypt, Sudan, and Chad.[16]

Figure 1: Italian trench at Shar al-Shatt, 10 November 1911: Gualtiero Castellini, *Nelle Trincee di Tripoli*, p. 32 (verso)

Finally, anticolonial rebels and counterinsurgents alike had to contend with the realities of the militarized natural environment, the medium through which imperial violence and subaltern resistance occurred. Much as the western front of

[16] David Atkinson, "Nomadic Strategies and Colonial Governance: Domination and Resistance in Cyrenaica, 1922–1932," in Joanne Sharp, et al., eds., *Entanglements of Power: Geographies of Domination/Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000), 93–121.

the First World War became synonymous in the European imagination with an "anti-landscape" of heavily manured soil turned impassibly muddy and lethally infectious, the Italian experience of Libya's "desolate panorama" was defined by extreme daytime temperatures, 140 kilometer per hour winds, endemic disease, and inconsistent access to potable water.[17] The unglamorous reality of armed conflict under these dismal conditions, which were in turn compounded by the violence itself, underscored for all involved that people may make their own geographies, but not on the terrain of their choice.[18]

The transformation of the diffuse Sanusi-Ottoman space into the Italian colonial state of Libya inaugurated of a new type of warfare, foreshadowing trends that became ubiquitous across Afro-Eurasian theaters of armed conflict during and after the First World War. As Italian forces pushed inland from the archipelago of urban centers along the Mediterranean coast in late 1911—with Ottoman volunteers and local irregulars holding their lines to an unexpected stalemate—they pioneered the style of trench combat that dominated the battlefields of Europe from 1914 to 1918. If not for the conspicuous palm trees and dunes, photographs of the outskirts of Tripoli and Benghazi from October 1911 could easily be mistaken for images of the battered French countryside a few years later (Fig. 1).[19] Thwarted by the Ottoman backed Sanusi resistance, Italy mobilized thousands of colonial troops from Eritrea and, to a lesser extent, Somalia, Yemen, and Libya itself. These

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[17] Derek Gregory, "The Natures of War," *Antipode* 48, no. 1 (2016): 3–56.

[18] On Said's interpolation of the famous lines from the *Eighteenth Brumaire* see the introduction to Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)*.

[19] Gualtiero Castellini, *Nelle trincee di Tripoli* (Bologna, N. Zanichelli, 1912).

indigenous forces would eventually outnumber their Italian counterparts by an order of magnitude, underscoring just how globalized warfare and state formation had become in this pivotal moment. Italian counterinsurgents were also pioneers of aerial terror. Targeted strikes and collective punishment of noncombatants had powerful didactic effect, while armed reconnaissance flights were pivotal both in the order of battle and post-conflict mapping of the colony.

Into the late 1920s the marriage of overwhelming force and technological superiority proved to be insufficient for the achievement of Italian objectives. In the final analysis, as I argue below, it was the colonial military leadership's willingness to raise the ante of state criminality to nearly unprecedented heights, culminating in a world-historic act of ethnic cleansing, that proved decisive. But this outcome was never a foregone conclusion. Libyan colonial state space was the byproduct of conflicting imperial, national, and local social forces with their own unique spatial orientations. The last chapter examined the territorial leanings of the Sanusi Order, highlighting its intermittent quarrels with its Ottoman partners over resources Sanusi adherents understood to be held in common, its preference for avoidance protest over armed confrontation, and the vast transregional influence of its Islamic anticolonial, relatively egalitarian, and non-national vision of collective identity. The following chapter develops these themes further while focusing on the military-strategic and technical-representational dimensions of Libyan territorial spatialization. Beginning with the geographical imaginaries of the Unionist and Italian regimes on the eve of the 1911 invasion, I argue that Sanusi mobile tactics and the militarization of the natural landscape profoundly informed Italian

counterinsurgency doctrine, a complex and reciprocal process that determined the ultimate form of the Libyan colonial state and the various strategies of ideological representation that called it into being.

Beggar Imperialism and the Civilized Bloodbath

Though the quote is probably apocryphal, Lenin is alleged to have described Italian overseas expansion around the time of the First World War as the "imperialism of beggars."[20] Whatever its provenance, the phrase adroitly captures the motivations behind Italy's aggression toward Istanbul during the run-up to the 1911 invasion. The Italian press spent the early months of that year acting as a force multiplier for the nationalist right and colonial lobby, priming an ambivalent public for wartime mobilization. By the early summer months, Rome's lien on Ottoman Libya was widely portrayed in Italian media as a "proletarian" nation's scrappy hunt for *lebensraum*—once converted into a settler colony, the Libyan provinces were supposed to provide a spatial fix to the demographic hemorrhaging and rural unrest that continued to plague Italy's agrarian South.[21] A credible pretext for the invasion finally came in April with the outbreak of the Second Moroccan (or Agadir) Crisis, a

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[20] Whether the Italian equivalent, *impero straccione*, is the original rendering or the loan translation remains a mystery, but the phrase does not appear in any English edition of Lenin's *Imperialism*, from which it is usually adduced, as in Claudio Segrè, "Beggar's Empire: Ideology and the Colonialist Movement in Liberal Italy," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society 4* (1979): 174–183.

[21] Marco Santoro, "Empire for the Poor: Imperial Dreams and the Quest for an Italian Sociology, 1870s–1950s," in George Steinmetz, ed., *Sociology and Empire: The Imperial Entanglements of a Discipline* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 106–165. On the exodus of millions of Southern Italians around the turn of the century see Mark Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

narrowly avoided hot war between France and Germany in Northwest Africa, which was ultimately resolved with the establishment of the French Protectorate at Fez in spring the following year. [22]

The implications were perfectly clear. According to British Ambassador James Rodd, when Italian Foreign Minister San Giuliano learned of the incident he turned to a subordinate and began tapping wordlessly on the face of his watch: if the lowliest great power was ever going to acquire a compensation prize for Tunisia, the moment had arrived.[23] Yet the Italians and their continental rivals were not the only states with vested interests in the region. As we have seen, the Ottoman government had spent the previous decades pursuing its own imperial modernist agenda for the Libyan provinces and their southern hinterlands in cooperation with the Sanusiyya, a policy that retained significant appeal, especially among the rehabilitated Unionist exiles who founded the breakaway National Constitution Party (*Milli Meşrutiyet Fırkası*: see chapter 2), after the CUP seized power in 1908. Even Prime Minister Giolitti, in a rare departure from the bluster that characterized Italian official rhetoric, acknowledged the seriousness of the Ottoman factor before the war commenced, famously musing, "The nationalists imagine Tripoli is the territory of a poor black simpleton whom a European state can dethrone when it wishes. But Tripoli is a province of the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman Empire is a great

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[22] Francesco Caccamo, "Italy, Libya, and the Balkans," in Dominik Geppert et al., eds., *The Wars before the Great War: Conflict and International Politics Before the Outbreak of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21–40.
[23] Timothy Childs, *Italo-Turkish Diplomacy and the War Over Libya: 1911–1912* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 29–48.

European power."[24] Though it is tempting to read this as a backhanded compliment masquerading as due deference, the hesitation was thoroughly vindicated in a matter of weeks.

By portraying Istanbul as peer competitors—according to this logic, the Ottoman ruling elite might also be described as "beggar imperialists," foreshadowing an essential insight of Ottoman historiography's postcolonial turn—Giolitti demonstrated a relatively nuanced understanding of the developmentalist policies implemented in North Africa under the Hamidian and Unionist regimes.[25] That agenda was, likewise, reflected in official and semi-official Ottoman geographic discourse. Exigencies of military preparedness and international legal questions surrounding the Empire's territorial integrity stimulated the development of a more professionalized Ottoman geography between 1911 and the end of the First World War.[26] Already by 1912, an extensive literature began to appear on the Arab provinces, including Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan.[27] One such text, the innocuously titled *Trablusgarb* by Mehmet Nuri (Conker) and Mahmut Naci (Balkış),

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[24] Bruce Vandervort, "A Military History of the Turco-Italian War (1911–1912) for Libya and its Impact on Italy's Entry into the First World War," in Vanda Wilcox, ed., *Italy in the Era of the Great War* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 14–29.
[25] Alan Mikhail and Christine Philliou. "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 721–745; Cem Emrence, "Imperial Paths, Big Comparisons: The Late Ottoman Empire," *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 3 (2008): 289–311.
[26] Yuval Ben-Bassat and Yossi Ben-Artzi, "Ottoman Maps of the Empire's Arab Provinces, 1850s to the First World War," *Imago Mundi* 70, no. 2 (2018): 199–211.
[27] Ali Akyıldız and Zekeriya Kurşun, *Osmanlı Arap Coğrafyası ve Avrupa Emperyalizmi* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2018).

offers a fascinating window onto the alternative Ottoman imaginary taking shape during this period.[28]

Trablusgarb opens with a survey of the political economy of the Libyan provinces, their administrative subdivisions, major revenue streams, and demographic features. As they turn to the region's history in subsequent chapters, Concker and Balkış show themselves to be at least as well acquainted with Libya's classical heritage as their Italian contemporaries. Their account begins in the Greek and Roman eras with colorful digressions on the origins of the toponym "Libya," the engineering achievements at Leptis Magna, and other familiar themes, culminating with the collapse of Byzantine authority in the seventh century.[29] It is at this point that they distinguish themselves from their Italian counterparts most conspicuously, demonstrating a rich understanding of North African Islamic history.

The authors describe complicated genealogies of rule from the first Islamic generation down to the Karamanlı and Tanzimat periods in the manner of a chronicle, relating episodes that are, perhaps understandably, omitted from most Italian sources, notably the centuries of Aghlabid rule in Sicily, which was then part of the Abbasid province of Ifriqiya.[30] After exhaustively detailing the comings and

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[28] Mehmet Nuri (Conker) and Mahmut Naci (Balkış), *Trablusgarb* (Istanbul: Tercüman-ı Hakikat Matbaası, 1914). Conker, a close confidant of Mustafa Kemal, was a volunteer officer in the 1911 war with ties to military intelligence. Balkış, a Tripoli native with roots in the Caucasus, was an MP for Tripolitania and a co-founder of Beşiktaş Gymnastics Club. For prosopographic background see Erik Zürcher, *The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905–1926* (Leiden: Brill, 1984).
[29] Conker and Balkış, *Trablusgarb*, 104–107.
[30] For background see Ramzi Rouighi, *The Making of a Mediterranean Emirate: Ifriqiya and Its Andalusis, 1200–1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

goings of a parade of Ottoman governors since 1835, they end with an analysis of

the hinterland concept and its deployment in recent international jurisprudence,

citing boundary disputes in Djanet and Ghat, the demarcation of Tripolitania's

border with French Tunisia, Ottoman dealings with various Tuareg confederacies,

and the positioning of European armies throughout the Sahara as key issue areas.[31]

Conker and Balkış articulate a uniquely Ottoman vision of African empire, an

idiosyncratic mélange of Unionist modernism, imperial nationalism, Muslim

solidarity (however performative or instrumental), and metropolitan paternalism

that drew its legitimacy from and aimed to reinvigorate the region's Islamic

commercial heritage. Under the subheading "an important note to those who claim

the Libyan provinces are worthless" (*mühim bir mülahaza Trablusgarp'a kimetsiz*

diyenlere) the pair insists that the unrealized potential of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica,

and Fezzan resides in their longstanding economic connections to the Sahara and

Sahel.[32] They call for the construction of a Tripoli-Sahara Railway (*Trablus-Sahra*

Şimendüferi) to connect Libya's Mediterranean port cities to the networked hubs of

Greater Sudan (*Biladüssudan*), in effect an Ottoman-sponsored, technologically

sophisticated revival of the traditional trans-Saharan routes (Fig. 2).[33] The authors

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[31] Conker and Balkış, *Trablusgarb*, Ibid, 108–194. On the hinterland framing see
Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the
Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Daniel Nordman,
"De Quelques Catégories de La Science Géographique: Frontière, Région et
Hinterland En Afrique Du Nord (19e et 20e Siècles)," *Annales* 52, no. 5 (1997): 969–
986.
[32] Conker and Balkış, *Trablusgarb*, 54–65.
[33] The Trans-Saharan Railway was French colonialism's idée fixe in Africa from the
turn of the century until the end of Vichy. Presumably a rival Ottoman effort would
have fared just as poorly. See T.W. Roberts, "The Trans-Saharan Railway and the
Politics of Imperial Expansion, 1890–1900," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth*

even give precise figures for the lengths of rail needed to complete each portion of the track, estimates of point-to-point travel times, and a forecast of the economic windfall awaiting any government capable and ambitious enough to act on their recommendations.

Line 1	Tripoli–Ghadamis–Timbuktu
Line 2	Tripoli–Ghat–"Hausa Sudan" (i.e. northern Nigeria)
Line 3	Tripoli–Murzuk–Bilma–Borno
Line 4	Tripoli–Murzuk–Tibesti–Wadai
Line 5	Benghazi–Awjila–Kufra–Wadai

Figure 2: Proposed routes of the Ottoman Imperial Tripoli-Sahara Railway, Mehmet Nuri (Conker) and Mahmut Naci (Balkış), *Trablusgarb*, 62–64.

Trablusgarb is the high-water mark of an Ottoman provincial geographical science that was still in its infancy when the Empire disappeared after the First World War. Institutional geography in Italy, while "advanced" by comparison, was also relatively underdeveloped at this time, but nevertheless played an important

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History 43, no. 3 (2015): 438–462; Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 95–115. For a longue durée perspective on Saharan political economy, focusing in particular on north-south ties across the desert, see James McDougall and Judith Scheele, eds., *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

part in Italian colonization up to the collapse of the Sanusi resistance in 1931.[34] Its

signal contribution from the late nineteenth century through the first two decades

of the twentieth occurred primarily in the ideological domain. By prefiguring Libya

as a uniform and legible space, the "queen of the imperial sciences" advanced a

modern, scientific case for occupation, exploitation, and, settlement.[35] It is useful in

this context to recall Massimo d'Azeglio's famous adage that having "made Italy," the

more significant challenge facing the Risorgimento generation would be to "make

Italians." Academic and popular geography played an instrumental role in the

formation of Italian national identity during and after the unification of the

peninsula. As the national project was consolidated and Italy began to catch up to

the more established imperial countries, the transference of geographical energies

to existing and potential colonies was a logical next step.[36] By the time of the 1884

Berlin Conference, a vocal lobby of "Africanists" concentrated in the financial houses

of the North—these would be the primary backers of subsequent expeditions—

began to advocate for Italian expansion into the Western Red Sea and South-Central

Mediterranean.[37]

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[34] Oppositional currents within Italian geography, primarily anarchist geographers
in the tradition of Reclus and Kropotkin, condemned Italian aggression in Africa as
part of a broad anticolonial politics that also encompassed anti-Habsburg
irredentism. See Federico Ferretti, "Arcangelo Ghisleri and the 'Right to Barbarity':
Geography and Anti-Colonialism in Italy in the Age of Empire (1875–1914),"
Antipode 48, no. 3 (2016): 563–583.
[35] Atkinson, "Politics of Geography" and "Geographical Knowledge."
[36] Santoro, "Empire for the Poor," makes a similar case for Italian sociology.
[37] See the two above-cited pieces by Atkinson, as well as his "Geopolitics,
Cartography, and Geographical Knowledge: Envisioning Africa from Fascist Italy," in
Bell, et al., eds., *Geography and Imperialism*. On national mapping and collective
identity formation see Craib, *Cartographic Mexico;* Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier
Fictions: Shaping the Iranian Nation, 1804–1946* (Princeton: Princeton University

Italian geographers conducted several early studies of Ottoman Libya in the late nineteenth century. Generally these were carried out under scientific auspices, but had ulterior, and fairly transparent, commercial motives.[38] The suspicion with which successive Ottoman provincial governors regarded their fieldwork impeded their progress rather severely, and the natural environmental obstacles of the interior made data collection a potentially fatal enterprise.[39] Nevertheless, this research received a major lift from the shifting winds of Mediterranean geopolitics on the eve of the Scramble for Africa as the loss of Ottoman Tunisia to the French in 1881 compelled the Italian state, via the *Istituto Geografico Militare* (IGM), to follow the lead of the Chamber of Commerce.[40]

Press, 1999); Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

[38] The best known among them are two expeditions bankrolled by the *Societa d'esplorazione commerciale in Africa* and a third voyage to the Green Mountain (Jabal al-Akhdar) region and Derna undertaken in 1881 (the latter findings were published in the *Bollettino della Società Geografica* a year later). See Atkinson, op. cit.

[39] Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Comitato per la documentazione dell'opera dell'Italia in Africa (CDOIA), *L'Italia in Africa: Storia della cartografia coloniale Italiana* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1964), 87–90. This rich and valuable source demands to be handled with caution. As the decolonization process accelerated in formerly Italian East Africa in the early 1950s, the Italian government commissioned a sweeping review of its colonial archives, including those of the IGM. The State Polygraphic Institute published the findings in dozens of serialized volumes. Assembled by some of the same figures whose activities they recount, these texts generally take a hagiographical line. They completely whitewash the genocidal violence of the 1920s and 1930s, both in Libya and East Africa. Nevertheless, they provide unique insight into official thinking, both at the time and in retrospect. The passages dealing with Italian cartography in Libya run the gamut from (superficially) anodyne to surprisingly candid, showcasing above all an intense official preoccupation with data collection.

[40] CDOIA, *L'Italia in Africa: Storia della cartografia coloniale Italiana*, 87–90. The authors also mention the relative underdevelopment of Ottoman scientific/geographic knowledge about the Libyan provinces, singling out as an important exception a 1:25,000 scale relief map of the fertile plain between Tajura

The humiliating Italian defeat at Adwa in 1896 temporarily depressed public

appetites for overseas adventurism, but the colonial lobby recovered in the first

decade of the new century, at which time Italian geographical discourse on Ottoman

Libya coalesced around three interwoven themes: *Mare Nostrum*, the notion that

twentieth-century Italians, heirs to the Roman imperial tradition, were obliged to

dominate Mediterranean affairs; *Africa Felix*, the notion that "barren" Libya, which

in classical antiquity had been a land of great abundance, might be restored under

Italian stewardship to its former productivity; and what might be called ecological

Orientalism, which asserted that benign Ottoman neglect was principally to blame

for the country's alleged state of infertility.[41] This colonial ideological matrix is on

prominent display in the 28 September ultimatum issued by the Italians to the

Ottoman government, which spoke in patronizing tones about the "state of disorder

and neglect in which Tripoli and Cyrenaica are left by Turkey" and the rights of their

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and Janzur composed by "Giamil [Cemil] Bey and Said Effendi" in 1906. It almost
goes without saying that the Italians were totally ignorant about the state of
Ottoman geographical writing on the region. For more on Italian financial interests
in the late Ottoman Empire see Giampaolo Conte, "Unholy Alliances: Disentangling
the Economic Relations between Italy, the Holy See, and the Ottoman Empire,"
International History Review (2020): 1–18. For background on the French-Italian
rivalry in Tunisia see Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in
an Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
[41] Michele Monserrati, "The Barren Mediterranean: Rural Imaginary in Italian
Colonial Libya," *California Italian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2020): 1–21; Samuel Agbamu,
"Mare Nostrum: Italy and the Mediterranean of Ancient Rome in the Twentieth and
Twenty-First Centuries," *Fascism* 8, no. 2 (2019): 250–274; Diana Davis,
"Imperialism, Orientalism, and the Environment in the Middle East: History, Policy,
Power, and Practice," in Diana Davis and Edmund Burke III, eds*., Environmental
Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press,
2011), 1–22. For a more charitable contemporary account of the Ottoman provincial
administration and its environmental impact during and after the Tanzimat see J.W.
Gregory, "Cyrenaica," *Geographical Journal* 47, no. 5 (1916): 321–342.

inhabitants to enjoy "the same progress as that attained by other [i.e. already

colonized] parts of Northern Africa."[42]

The first wave of professional surveys began on the heels of the 1911

invasion. Between the initial landing and the outbreak of the First World War, the

IGM conducted several professionalized technical studies of Libyan geodynamics,

hydrology, and topography.[43] As early as 1916, the Ministry of Colonies and Military

Political Office also began to produce ethnological maps, illustrating themes such as

the distribution of Cyrenaican tribes (Fig 3), to supplement detailed cartographic

itineraries of their battlefield operations. Crucially, the feasible remit of these

descriptive works remained confined to the sliver of Mediterranean coastline

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[42] "Ultimatum from Italy to Turkey Regarding Tripoli," *London Times*, 29 September 1911.

[43] The emergence of Libyan studies as a bona fide field of inquiry in Italy coincided with these developments. Three prominent Italian nationalists and Southern Question theorists led the way: Angiolo Orvieto, poet and editor of the Florentine literary review *Il Marzocco*; Sidney Sonnino, parliamentarian, future prime minister, and head negotiator at the Paris Peace Conference; and Leopoldo Franchetti, chief colonial agronomist and leader of the unsuccessful campaign to settle Italian peasants in the Eritrean Highlands. Together they founded the Italian Society for Libyan Studies (*Società Italiana per lo studio della Libia*) in 1912. The organization published on topics as diverse as geology, archaeology, and popular religion, e.g. Aldobrandino Malvezzi, *L'Italia e l'Islam in Libia* (Florence: Fratelli Treves, 1913). The Society also published a quarter-annual scholarly journal, *Archivio Bibliografico Coloniale,* in conjunction with the Colonial Agricultural Institute (*Istituto Agricolo Coloniale*). For more background on the founders see Robert Maryks, *"Pouring Jewish Water into Fascist Wine": Untold Stories of (Catholic) Jews from the Archive of Mussolini's Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Stephen Bruner, "Leopoldo Franchetti and Italian Settlement in Eritrea: Emigration, Welfare Colonialism and the Southern Question," *European History Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2009): 71–94; Nelson Moe, "The Emergence of the Southern Question in Villari, Franchetti, and Sonnino," in Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country* (London: Routledge, 1998), 51–76.

running from Zuwara to Tobruk and the immediately adjacent hinterland.[44] Only

after the initiation of the Italian *riconquista* in 1922—just prior to the March on

Rome and fascist takeover of government—did the pace of geographical output on
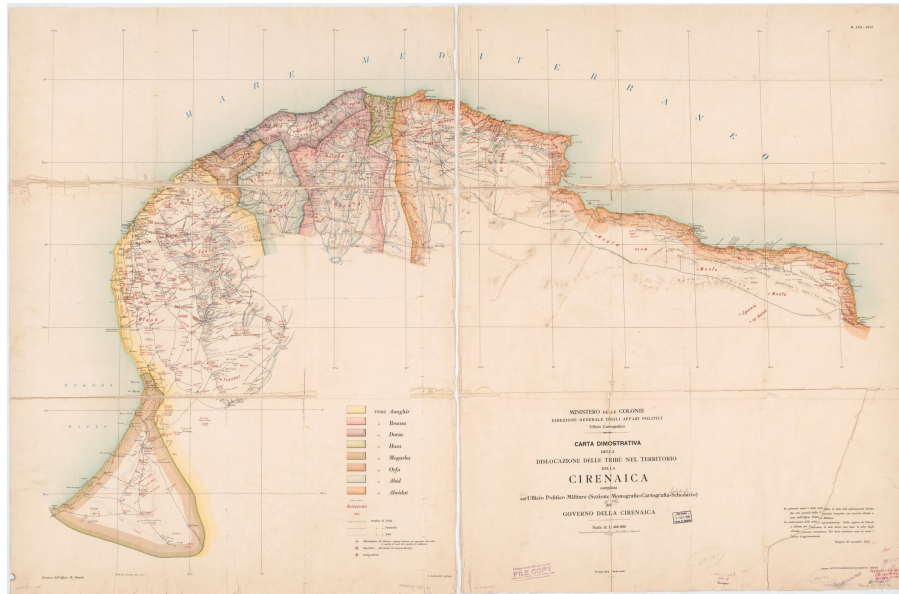
Libya accelerate to a stride.

Figure 3: Italian ethnological map showing the distribution of tribes in Cyrenaica (1916), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division.

Geography held a special utilitarian appeal for the fascist regime.[45] Mussolini

believed that elevating popular geographical awareness (*conscienza geografica*)

would help Italians overcome the parochialisms of place that continued to dog the

country's political culture, deepen nationalist commitments, and cultivate an

imperial geopolitical attitude. Perhaps more importantly, fascist officials took for

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[44] CDOIA, *Storia della cartografia coloniale Italiana*, 90–100; Comando del corpo di occupazione della Tripolitania, *Notizie sul Cazà di Gadàmes* (Tripoli: Ufficio Politico Militare, 1913).

[45] Fittingly, Mussolini worked as a primary school geography instructor in his early twenties. Atkinson, op. cit.

granted geography's claim to be a uniquely comprehensive and synoptic discipline, understanding geographical research to be politically invaluable insofar as it was able to capture the entire social, cultural, and environmental gestalt of the colonies and wider interwar world.[46] Despite Mussolini's extravagant patronage of the *Società Geografica Italiana* (SGI), the field was only able to deliver on these totalizing pretensions once the counterinsurgency reached a victorious conclusion; the first triangulated map of modern territorial Libya (*carta generale dell'interna colonia*) at a scale of 1:1,000,000 was not completed until the early 1930s.[47]

The 1911 conflict between liberal Italy and the Unionist government pitted two distinct imperial-national geographies—each hamstrung and degraded in reality, albeit in its own particular way—against one another. Operating under immense constraints, both parties were unprepared for the ensuing drawn-out fight, which drained Italian government coffers and launched the Ottoman state down the path to dissolution. Three decades of geographical research did little to ready the Italian military for the quixotic task of invading and occupying Ottoman Libya. Incredibly, its own service magazine, *Revista Militare Italiana*, was still reliant on classical sources of information on the region's landscape and population up to the eve of the invasion.[48] The Ottomans, on the other hand, were kneecapped by British and French official neutrality: unable to dispatch troops to the frontlines because of an Anglo-Egyptian blockade, the Unionist government was forced to rely

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[46] Ibid.

[47] CDOIA, *Storia della cartografia coloniale Italiana*, 102–103.

[48] Vanda Wilcox, "The Italian Soldiers' Experience in Libya, 1911–1912," in Geppert et al., eds., *Wars before the Great War,* 42–57. For the ultimatum see Board of Editors, "Tripoli (Editorial Comment)," *American Journal of International Law* 6, no.1 (1912): 149–155.

on a small group of volunteer officers who covertly entered the country before the invasion commenced (resupply routes through French Tunisia, like the abovementioned networks Southern Anatolia, operated in much the same manner).[49]

The pacification campaign of the 1920s, conducted under fascist auspices, is notorious for its horrific violence, but the 1911 to 1912 phase of the war was equally grisly. Italian politicians expected a quick, decisive victory and made promises to that effect on the home front. Things did not go as planned. Following the bombardment and occupation of Tripoli, Sanusi irregulars rushed to the aid of the city's small Ottoman garrison and the first wave of Unionist volunteers. These commandos brought substantial military acumen to the Libyan theater, some of which they learned in the Hamidian regime's German-model officer schools, and some of which they acquired through practical experience of counterinsurgency in Southeastern Europe. Many of them cut their teeth in the Ottoman Third Army (Skopje and Salonica), and had grudgingly come to admire the guerilla maneuvers used against them by national separatist rebels in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia.[50] Such tactics proved to be effective in North Africa as they had been in the Balkans. Meanwhile, other Ottoman *fedais* such as Sami Çölgeçen came to the front with prior and fairly intimate Libyan experience, having spent years in exile

[49] See Aziz Samih İlter, *Trablusgarp Harbi'nin Gizli Cephesi* (Istanbul: Çolpan Kitap, 2019) for the memoirs of an Ottoman officer working behind the French Tunisian borderline in 1911.
[50] Benjamin Fortna, *The Circassian: A Life of Eşref Bey, Late Ottoman Insurgent and Special Agent* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 57. For more on the Balkan insurgencies see İpek Yosmaoğlu, *Blood Ties: Religion, Violence and the Politics of Nationhood in Ottoman Macedonia, 1878–1908* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

acquainting themselves intimately with the terrain, population, and local Arabic

dialect. These figures played a key coordinative role, mediating between the

Ottoman government and Sanusi armed resistance.

Less than a month into the ground invasion Italian forces had already

occupied the coastal city of al-Khums and began pushing inland, in crescent-shaped

trench formations, toward the oases outside Tripoli.[51] On 23 October, Ottoman

forces broke through the Italian line east of the city at Shar al-Shatt just as a

diversionary attack cleared the way for Sanusi forces to approach from the rear.

Caught in this well-laid trap, Italian infantry regiments were easily overwhelmed.

The result was a grisly massacre—one of the most infamous episodes of its kind in

Italy's colonial history—that cost the Italian military hundreds of killed and

wounded, including some 250 soldiers tortured and dismembered at a nearby

cemetery. The enraged Italians responded brutally with house-to-house raids,

indiscriminate summary executions, mass deportations of supposed opponents to

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[51] A foreign correspondents embedded with the Italians offers a vivid description of the scene: "Inland from the town of Tripoli, and all along the coast to the east, lies the oasis, a bewildering labyrinth of palm gardens, orchards, and olive groves, intersected by sandy roads and innumerable winding paths. The roads are linked, and the gardens are divided, by sunbaked earthen walls, or huge hedges of prickly pear. Low Arab houses cluster here and there by the roadside, occasionally forming a group large enough to be called a village; and everywhere there are seen the tall twin staircase-like erections that mark an Arab well. It would be hard to find an uglier terrain for an unexpected fight, or one more easy [sic] for an insidious and desperate enemy, who knew the ground, to employ to the best advantage." See W.K. McClure, *Italy in North Africa: An Account of the Tripoli Enterprise* (London: Constable and Company, 1913), 60–61.

detention facilities inside Italy itself, and spectacle lynchings, all of which would

become recurring motifs in the 1920s and early 1930s.[52]

It is instructive to read commentary on these developments from the

international Catholic press, which followed the issue closely and might reasonably

be expected to hold pro-Italian sympathies. In spring 1912, the US-based monthly

Catholic World described the ongoing conflict in the following terms:

> There are at least 92,000 Italian soldiers, and yet they are for the most part
> on the defensive. With the smallest of means, cut off, too, from Turkey and
> the seacoast, the 8,000 or so Turks with the allied Arabs have surprised the
> world by the activity they have displayed and their success in resisting the
> Italian attack. They, too, in their turn have horrified the world by the
> barbarity of the treatment meted out to the Italian soldiers who fell into their
> hands. Mutilation is only a minor atrocity; for in some cases the prisoners
> have been crucified with the accompaniment of unmentionable barbarities
> [castration; live burial in mass graves]. *It is in this way that reprisals have
> been taken for the wholesale massacres of which the Italian troops in the
> beginning were guilty. The rest of the world has a right to express its
> condemnation of both—a right which* [sic] *Italians are precluded by their own
> bad conduct from exercising*.[53]

As this commentary suggests, the war was defined from the outset by

genuine atrocities, as well as atrocity mongering and mutual recrimination, a battle

in microcosm for public opinion that played itself out in the pages of the

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[52] John Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2014), 44. On the unusual Italian policy of deporting anticolonial
rebels to the metropole see Francesca Di Pasquale, "The 'Other' at Home:
Deportation and Transportation of Libyans to Italy During the Colonial Era (1911–
1943)," *International Review of Social History* 63, no. 26 (2018): 211–231. For a
unique and unsettling photo archive of these events see Pierre Schill, *Réveiller
l'archive d'une guerre colonial: Photographies et écrits de Gaston Cherau,
correspondant de guerre lors du conflit italo-turc (1911–1912)* (Paris: Créaphis,
2018).
[53] "Recent Events: Italy, Turkey," *Catholic World* 94 (1912), 853–857. My emphasis.

international press (to a decisive Ottoman victory, it must be added, though this had

no substantive impact).[54] From the first days of the invasion in autumn 1911,

Istanbul lobbied outside powers to intervene on legal and humanitarian grounds to

prevent Italian war crimes, including the use of expanding munitions, indiscriminate

murder of civilians, and aerial bombardment, all of which were expressly forbidden

by the Hague Conventions, as Ottoman jurists repeatedly insisted.[55] The Ottoman

government also balked at Italy's unilateral claim to have annexed of the whole of

the three provinces when it only held small enclaves along the coast. While the

neutral powers turned a deaf ear to these protests, the Unionist officers and their

Sanusi allies continued to establish facts on the ground. Though Istanbul's freedom

of maneuver was severely attenuated by the Mediterranean blockade, Italy was

never able to penetrate far beyond the coast. Lacking the resources to expel the

Italians entirely, the Ottoman government sued for peace in 1912 when an

existential crisis broke out in the Balkans.

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[54] Giorgio Bertellini, "Dramatizing the Italian-Turkish War (1911–12): Reports of Atrocities, Newsreels, and Epic Films in Italy and the USA," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 14, no. 2 (2016): 131–154.

[55] For accusations that Italy targeted or indiscriminately attacked civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and Red Crescent encampments, see BOA HR SFR 3/655/6 (1912) and BOA BEO 4001/300068 (1912). On the aerial bombing of a hospital in 'Ain Zara (Aynüzzera) see BOA HR SYS 2907/98 (1911). On expanding munitions—so-called "dum-dum bullets" (*domdom kurşunu*)—see BOA HR SFR 4/429/52 (1911). For a juridical protest letter, circulated by a certain Lord Avebury and cosigned by dozens of international jurists and prominent politicians, which condemned Italian aggression and recommended the Ottoman-Italian case be taken to The Hague for arbitration see BOA HR SFR 4 655/1 (1912). For Ottoman communications with London asking for a halt of coal shipments to Italy (naturally the British government declined) while the conflict was still ongoing see BOA H SFR 648/1/10 (17 November 1911). For appeals to the US government see "Turkey Asks Intervention: Charges Italy with Barbarities" *Boston Daily Globe*, 6 November 1911.

Whether or not Lenin is responsible for coining the term "beggar imperialism" is impossible to say. But he was certainly a keen observer of Italian foreign policy. Writing from exile in Krakow in the 28 September 1912 edition of *Pravda*, as Ottoman and Italian diplomats were finalizing the terms of the Treaty of Ouchy, which theoretically paused active hostilities until the outbreak of the First World War, he offered remarks on the state of affairs in Libya that turned out to be prophetic:

> The Arabs put up a desperate resistance. When, at the beginning of the war, the Italian admirals were incautious enough to land 1,200 marines, the Arabs attacked them and killed some 600. By way of "retaliation", about 3,000 Arabs were butchered; whole families were plundered and done to death, with women and children massacred in cold blood. The Italians are a civilized, constitutional nation. About 1,000 Arabs were hanged. The Italian casualties exceeded 20,000, including 17,429 sick, 600 missing and 1,405 killed. The war cost the Italians over 800 million lire, or over 320 million rubles. It resulted in terrible unemployment and industrial stagnation. The Arabs lost about 14,800 lives. Despite the "peace", the war will actually go on, for the Arab tribes in the heart of Africa, in areas far away from the coast, will refuse to submit. And for a long time to come they will be "civilized" by bayonet, bullet, noose, fire, and rape.[56]

How did Italian counterinsurgency doctrine evolve in response to stubborn Ottoman defenses, the uniquely difficult conditions of the combat terrain, and the Sanusi Order's highly effective mobile guerrilla warfare tactics? As this counterinsurgency doctrine took on an increasingly draconian character after the rise of fascism in the early 1920s, how were the technical-scientific dimensions of territorial spatialization refracted through the prism of military and strategic decision-making? How did these dynamics shape the ultimate form taken by the

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[56] Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works, Volume 18* (Moscow: Progress, 1975), 337–338.

Libyan colonial state, in ways that would have been impossible to anticipate for Conker, Balkış, or the early Italian geographers researching the region as part of the early colonial forays of the 1900s? The following sections examine these issues by investigating the "geometry of counterinsurgency" Graziani and company developed for the anti-Sanusi pacification campaign of the 1920s and early 1930s. The tenacious resistance of mobile populations and Italian efforts to subdue them through the domination of area, volume, and perimeter were the most consequential factors in the production of Libyan territorial space following the Ottoman collapse.

Area: The *Ascari* Network in Italian Colonial Africa

Gebreyesus Hailu's seminal Tigrinya language novel *The Conscript*—written in 1927 from Vatican City while its author was in training for the Ethiopian Catholic priesthood—offers a firsthand account of life in Italy's Royal Corps of Colonial Troops (RCTC) through the eyes of Tuquabo, a young "Habesha" recruit from the rural highlands outside Asmara.[57] Often cited as a precursor to the firebrand anticolonial polemics of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Amílcar Cabral, Hailu's text depicts a wartime experience so harrowing that it compels the Eritrean recruits to confront their own participation, as willing enforcers, in the unjust hierarchies of empire.[58]

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[57] Gebreyesus Hailu, *The Conscript: A Novel of Libya's Anticolonial War* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).
[58] Ibid, Laura Chrisman's introduction, xxi. The title of the novel is a misnomer, since the vast majority of Eritrean *ascari* volunteered for military service.

The narrative begins with a voyage into the unknown. Tuquabo and his

comrades leave their comfortable hillside villages and descend to Massawa, where

they are herded onto an Italian ship and stationed in the open air like cattle.[59] As

they sail anxiously toward Suez, they are confronted by a stream of never-before-

seen landscapes, each melting into the next: Port Sudan, which they regard as

quintessentially African, gives them their first inkling of doubt, and they wonder if

the Sudanese despise them for their servility to the Italians. Further north they are

deeply moved by Biblical geography, the site where Moses parted the Red Sea, and

begin reciting scripture in Ge'ez. Urban Egypt past the canal is a patristic space, the

historical seat of the Coptic Church, and a conflicted icon of both holiness and

wickedness for the Habesha. Naturally, the real trouble begins when they drop

anchor in Derna.[60]

Like other European colonial powers in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century, Italy invested heavily in the recruitment, training, and frontline

deployment of native (*indigeni*) troops, forces that did most of the leg work in the

Scramble for Africa.[61] Also like the other European colonial powers, the Italians had

a quirky, somewhat obnoxious tendency to appropriate terms from the Turco-

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[59] The contrast of Tuquabo's rural origins to the cosmopolitan world of Massawa is an important theme of the early chapters. The protagonist's humble beginnings predispose him to sympathize with the Sanusi resistance by the novel's end. For background see Jonathan Miran, *Red Sea Citizens: Cosmopolitan Society and Cultural Change in Massawa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
[60] Hailu, *The Conscript*, 11–21.
[61] For more on indigenous troops in colonial armies see Nir Arielli, *From Byron to Bin Laden: A History of Foreign War Volunteers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018)); David Killingray and David Omissi, eds., *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700–1964* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

Arabic military lexicon, especially vocabulary describing function and rank. Thus the first troops conscripted in Eritrea after the bloodless Italian seizure of Massawa in 1885 acquired the name *basci buzuk*, from the Ottoman Turkish *başıbozuk*, an all-encompassing label applied in its original context to irregular combatants of diverse regional origins.[62] As successive waves of indigenous soldiers from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen volunteered for the RCTC in the 1890s, they were lumped together under the umbrella designation *ascari*, a term derived from the Turkish and Arabic for soldiers (*asker/'askar*), adopted in its singular Arabic form, *'askari*, simply, "soldier."[63]

Italian colonialism on the African continent was a highly integrated, networked system rather than a fragmented patchwork of autonomous enterprises.[64] The primary institution through which Italy's colonial possessions were connected was unquestionably the Italian military, witnessed by the transnational careers of its high-ranking officers, who habitually bounced from one colony to another before and after the rise of the Mussolini dictatorship. Native battalions, though much less distinguished than this itinerant officer class, played an

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[62] Stephen Bruner, "'At Least So Long As We Are Talking About Marching, the Inferior Is Not the Black, It's the White': Italian Debate over the Use of Indigenous Troops in the Scramble for Africa," *European History Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2014): 33–54. For more on the Italian occupation of Massawa see Mostafa Minawi, "International Law and the Precarity of Ottoman Sovereignty in Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century," *International History Review* (2020): 1–24; Giuseppe Finaldi, *A History of Italian Colonialism, 1860–1907: Europe's Last Empire* (London: Routledge, 2016).
[63] CDOIA, *L'Italia in Africa: L'opera dell'esercito (1885–1943), Tomo I: Ordinamento e reclutamento* (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1960), 73–156.
[64] Massimo Zaccaria, "Italian Colonialism in Africa as a Connected System: Institutions, Men, and Colonial Troops," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47, no. 4 (2019): 1–24.

even more integral part in the colonial state formation process. The RCTC recruited

the *ascari* by ethnicity on the basis of perceived martial effectiveness and enticed

them with regular wages, prestige, and the promise of social mobility: by the second

year of the Ottoman-Italian war, the army was effectively functioning as colonial

corporation, hiring a massive labor force from around the Horn of Africa and Red

Sea Basin.[65] Celebrated for their loyalty and field performance and entrusted with

sensitive constabulary duties at home, the *ascari* served as the everyday

intermediaries of Italianization both domestically and in foreign military campaigns

(Fig. 4).[66]

Hailu describes Tuquabo's journey from Derna to the Sanusi-held areas of

inner Cyrenaica as a march through Dante's Inferno. Accustomed to the lush,

undulating Eritrean countryside, the recruits find themselves in a "hot, dry

wilderness without a single tree or blade of grass, much less any water." They

trudge endlessly, often without shoes, through "craters of ash" while their Italian

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[65] CDOIA, *L'opera dell'esercito*, 73–81 discusses the "psychology of the indigenous element constituting our colonial units" (*psicologia dell'elemento indigeno costituente i nostri reparti coloniali*) and the ethno-politics of *ascari* recruitment. For more on the social and economic consequences see Stefano Bellucci and Massimo Zaccaria, "Wage Labor and Mobility in Colonial Eritrea, 1880s to 1920s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 86 (2014): 89–106.
[66] Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, "Colonialism and the Construction of National Identities: The Case of Eritrea," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 1, no. 2 (2007): 256–276; Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014). Italian military and civil officials unanimously praised the loyalty and combat prowess of the Eritrean *ascari* (they were less enthusiastic about their Somali and Libyan counterparts). For a range of testimonials from the twenty years of the counterinsurgency see Carmine Morelli, *Califfi, Tribunali, Habus* (Napoli: R. Ricciardi, 1912), 27–28; Massimo Vitale, *I Meharisti ed i Mehar*a (Benghazi: Pubblicazioni del Governo della Cirenaica, 1927); Rodolfo Graziani, *Verso il Fezzan* (Benghazi: Fratelli Pavone, 1934), 198–201. This was also picked up by the Anglophone press, e.g. "Italy Regains Libya by Valor Of Colonials," *New York Herald Tribune*, 24 July 1923.

superiors ride in comparative comfort on mules. They sleep on the ground in the frigid night air, their ammunition tied to their bodies. The blazing temperatures and violent windstorms that fill their bellies with sand ensure they are constantly nauseous and at potential risk of stroke. Meanwhile the officers greedily hoard scare water resources for their own use, compounding the torment by forcing the Habesha to stand guard over the tanks at night.[67]

BENGASI - Squadrone dei Mehari (cammelli corridori)   29
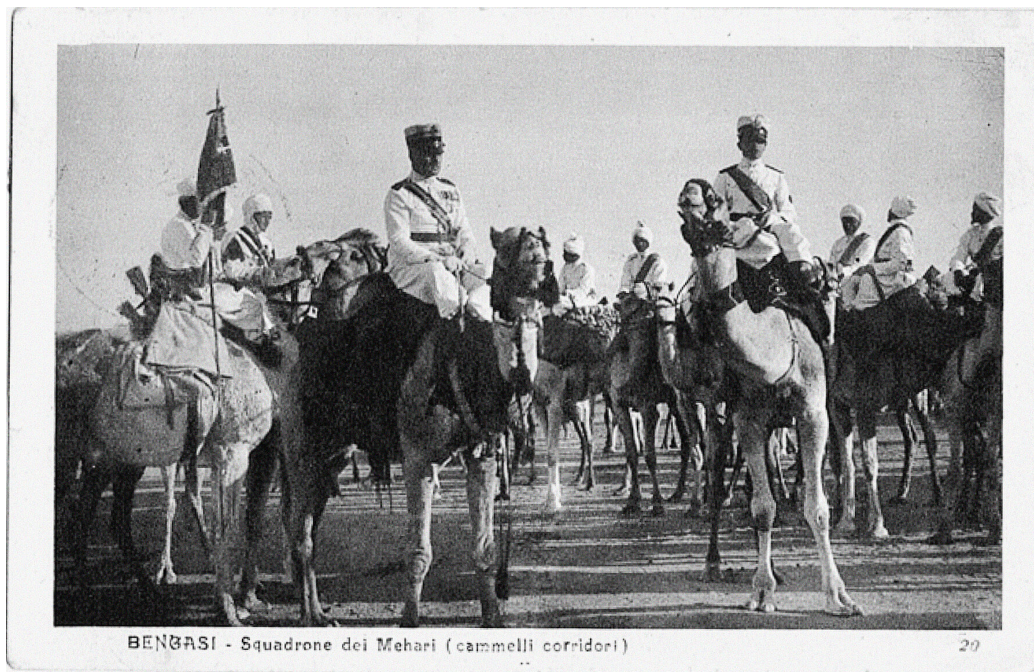
Figure 4: Libyan Meharisti (camelback *ascari* often assigned to domestic policing details), Benghazi, 1924: Gedenk und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannseekonferenz

Metropolitan troops, who were totally unprepared for these conditions, complained just as vociferously as the *ascari* in their private correspondence.[68]

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[67] Hailu, *The Conscript*, 23–43.
[68] Simone Colonnelli, "Il soldato italiano alla guerra moderna: La campagna di Libia descritta nelle lettere dei combattenti (1911–1912)," *Italies: Littérature-Civilisation-Société* 19 (2015): 15–36.

Between the extreme climate and the tenacious Sanusi-Ottoman opposition there was no shortage of lethal hazard for Italian soldiers in Libya. Making matters worse, the rot of death transformed the battlefield terrain into a hotbed of bacterial infection. Cholera had arrived in Tripoli just before the Italians. An outbreak began in Trabzon the previous year and slowly burned through the Ottoman lands, following in the footsteps of rank and file soldiers as the meandered around the Empire. As the Italians dug in after the catastrophe at Shar al-Shatt, famed British journalist W.T. Stead speculated that the "putrefaction of the countless unburied bodies which littered the oases after [the Italian] massacres" was contributing to the high transmission rate.[69]

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[69] Western media tracked the cholera outbreak closely. See "Italians to March against the Turks," *New York Times*, 13 October 1911; "Italian Loss by Night Fighting and Cholera: Uncensored Dispatch Says Turks and Arabs Far from Surrendering," *New York Tribune*, 20 October 1911; "State of Tripoli," *North China Herald*, 11 November 1911; "Cholera in Tripoli," *Times of India*, 13 January 1912. Quarantine protocol around the Mediterranean contributed as much to the difficulties of Unionist officers entering Libya covertly as the blockade imposed by the neutral powers. See Fortna, *The Circassian*, 66.

Figure 5: *Ascari* **review W.K. McClure,** *Italy in North Africa: An Account of the Tripoli Enterprise*, **144**

Nir Arielli has explained the Italian policy of substituting *ascari* for metropolitan troops in terms of loss aversion. East African soldiers were much less expensive to equip and maintain than their Italian counterparts. Furthermore, the Italian public had little appetite for casualties, especially after the heavy losses sustained during the First World War. In any case, *ascari* performed better under pressure—they were mobile enough to keep pace with Sanusi irregulars, while "white troops were like a ball and chain on the feet of colonial commanders"—and generally more reliable than Italians, who were generally disaffected and threatened to provoke a political backlash.[70] Little wonder that the number of *ascari* in Libya

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[70] Nir Arielli, "Colonial Soldiers in Italian Counter-Insurgency Operations in Libya, 1922–32," *British Journal for Military History* 1, no. 2 (2015), 47–66.

skyrocketed, especially as a proportion of overall troop commitments, after the

disastrous autumn of 1911 (Fig. 5). In 1914, the earliest year for which data is

available, there were 50,500 metropolitan soldiers and 19,000 *ascari* stationed in

Libya; by 1928, as operations in Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Sirte were drawing to a

close and the Italians were preparing the coup de grace in Cyrenaica, the colonial

rank and file numbered 28,558 while the Italian presence had been reduced to

12,672 (a figure that includes blackshirt volunteers).[71]

       This policy was constantly on the verge of collapse. The mobilization of such

a large segment of the population—nearly four percent of the country in 1916, a

staggering figure with no precedent anywhere else in colonial Africa—upended the

Eritrean economy by creating an artificial shortage of working age males.[72] This

economic chaos was compounded by major political unrest throughout the region,

especially its heavily contested border areas, after the death of Menelik II in 1913.

The Ottoman government, having ruled in Eritrea within living memory, followed

these events with interest. On 9 June 1914, just weeks before the Sarajevo

assassinations that ignited the First World War, Ottoman ambassador to Italy Nabi

Bey (Menemenlizade or Menemencioğlu Mehmed Nabi) wrote Grand Vizier Said

Halim Pasha with fresh details about Italy's *ascari* dilemma.[73] Several of the

battalions active in Libya, "on which the greatest hopes were based [in Rome] to

overcome the resistance of Sheikh Sanusi," had been hastily repatriated to Asmara

after a series of clashes in the Ethiopian borderlands. Nabi Bey speculated the

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[71] Ibid, 52.
[72] Zaccaria, "Italian Colonialism," 13–14.
[73] BOA HR SYS 2919/44 (9 June 1914).

Italians had redeployed these *ascari* because they were bogged down on multiple

fronts: with Leftist riots ongoing in Romagna and a peasant revolt threatening the

Italian-backed puppet government in Albania, Rome could not restore order in East

Africa without the Habesha in the lead.[74]

Tuquabo acquits himself admirably in engagements with the Sanusiyya, but

this gives him no satisfaction, only shame and a lingering fear of reprisal: if the day

ever comes when a French or Italian army leads the Bedouin of Cyrenaica into battle

against the Habesha, he wonders, will they "pay him back with a vengeance?"[75]

These anxieties turned out to be well founded. Already by February 1912, Italy had

started to recruit Libyan collaborators to fight in irregular bands, and later formed

regular *ascari* battalions as well. While these troops were involved heavily in the

pacification of Tripolitania and Fezzan until 1928, they proved to be unreliable in

Cyrenaica, where they routinely betrayed Italian confidence by passing ammunition

and intelligence to the resistance.[76] If these Italianized Libyans (*mutalyanin*) were

an imperfect weapon in domestic counterinsurgency operations, they amply

demonstrated their usefulness elsewhere. Some 20,000 Libyan *ascari* under Marshal

Rodolfo Graziani's command participated in the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936,

fulfilling Tuquabo's premonition.[77] In the late 1930s Italo Balbo, the famed

blackshirt leader and aviation minister who governed as united Libya's first colonial

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Hailu, *The Conscript*, 29.

[76] Arielli, "Colonial Soldiers," 60; Alessandro Volterra, "Askaris and the Great War: Colonial Troops Recruited in Libya for the War but Never Sent to the Austrian Front," in Shiferaw Bekele, et al., eds., *The First World War from Tripoli to Addis Ababa, 1911–1924* (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2018) [open access: not paginated].

[77] "Italians Enlist Natives," *New York Times*, 24 September 1935.

viceroy, even raised a battalion of indigenous Libyan paratroopers, whom he christened, perhaps with tongue in cheek, *ascari del cielo*.[78]

Northeast African colonial soldiers exemplified Italy's area-wide strategy for pacifying mobile and rebellious social forces in Libya from the early days of the occupation before the First World War. Though they provided Rome with a significant advantage on a particularly inhospitable combat terrain, their combined forces were insufficient to quell popular resistance or neutralize the mobile and embedded fighters of the Sanusi Order. Yet another tool in the Italian strategic arsenal, military aviation, multiplied their effectiveness. As I argue in the next section, the effort to impose order vertically and volumetrically with the aid of sophisticated new technologies came up against similar limitations.

<center>Volume: The Command of the Air</center>

In *Terror from the Air*, philosopher Peter Sloterdijk famously claims the twentieth century had an objective starting date—22 April 1915, when a German gas regiment in the northern Ypres Salient dropped chlorine cylinders on an unsuspecting battalion of French-Canadian troops below.[79] A less Eurocentric narrative might begin instead on 1 November 1911, when Italian pilot Giulio Gavotti carried out the first aerial bombing in history over the Tripoli suburbs of Tajura and 'Ain Zara. A week had passed since the massacre at Shar al-Shatt, and the scorched earth Italian reprisal campaign was already underway. Cruising at an altitude of 700 meters, Gavotti leaned out the side of an Austrian Etrich Taube and released four

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[78] CDOIA, *L'opera dell'esercito*, 159–170.
[79] Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

Haasen hand grenades, each weighing just two kilos, on the small oasis where he

spotted 2,000 irregulars the previous day (he allegedly removed the pins with his

teeth). Big things indeed have small beginnings.[80]

The colonization of Libya coincided precisely with the fledgling development

of machine flight, a technology that dissolved continental and oceanic boundaries,

redrew the map of international politics, and transformed global perceptions of

proximity and distance.[81] If Italy's approach to the conquest of area simply took

existing colonial recruitment practices to their logical conclusion, its experiments

with counterinsurgent aviation were genuinely revolutionary, ushering in the era of

"cheap aerial occupation"—Britain adopted similar measures in Afghanistan,

Somaliland, Iraq, and Palestine immediately after World War I, and France soon did

the same in Morocco and Syria.[82] This is perhaps unsurprising given the Italian

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[80] Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing* (New York: The New Press, 2001).

[81] Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 226–283.

[82] Evidence of this influence is on candid display in BNA AIR 9/15 (1920), a cabinet memo written by Winston Churchill, then head of the Air Ministry, on the use of airpower to combat indigenous resistance in Britain's colonies. He writes, "The capacity of the Air Force to deal a swift and unexpected blow may indeed succeed in stifling an outbreak [i.e. rebellion] in its early stages, but it is in the power to continue offensive action day after day and week after week that its assurance of ultimate success lies. The following up of brief aerial attacks by the action of ground troops is only playing into the hands of the tribesmen by substituting for a foe against whom their efforts can effect little, an enemy whom they can meet on comparatively favorable terms; heavy and persistent aerial action can so dislocate living conditions and cause such material destruction as ultimately to compel the submission of the most recalcitrant tribes." For more background on colonial airpower in the 1920s see Thomas Hippler, *Governing from the Skies: A Global History of Aerial Bombing* (London: Verso, 2017); David Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

right's obsessive identification with aeronautics. *Aeromania* profoundly influenced

Italian culture and society for thirty years, with obvious through lines connecting

Gabriele D'Annunzio's mythical poetry, second generation Futurism's *aeropittura*

arts movement, Giulio Douhet's controversial airpower theories, and the

charismatic leadership of a figure like Balbo, Italian fascism's most celebrated

aviator. The war for Ottoman Libya was the crucible in which this romantic, quasi-

mystical fascination with airpower was forged.[83]

From the ground looking up there was nothing particularly noble about it.

Italian airstrikes routinely killed noncombatants and irregulars taking peaceful

reprieves far away from the front, which the Ottoman government credibly and

justifiably labeled war crimes.[84] But even contemporary observers understood that

there was more to the policy than simple brute force. When Gavotti made his

circular approach to 'Ain Zara from the Mediterranean on the morning of 1

November, he had no orders to bomb its civilian population, or even any irregulars

assembled there. On the contrary, it was supposed to be a straightforward

reconnaissance mission. Gavotti's actions jumbled traditionally separate military

functions—information gathering and artillery assault—leading to much

subsequent confusion: was this an intelligence operation, tactical combat, or a

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[83] Katia Pizzi, *Italian Futurism and the Machine* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019); Fernando Esposito, *Fascism, Aviation and Mythical Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2015).
[84] BOA HR HMŞ İŞO 203/25 (1911).

strategic attack on an entire social ecosystem, a deliberate attempt to demoralize the resistance into submission?[85]

The Italian military added dirigibles to its arsenal as early as the 1880s, and conducted a number of war games with these, and eventually with heavier-than-air equipment, between 1903 and 1911. The pioneer theorists of airpower made several assumptions when running these experiments that proved inapplicable in Ottoman Libya. First, Italian strategists took for granted that their opponent would also use military aviation. Spurred by the events of 1 November, Ottoman War Minister Mahmud Şevket Pasha tenaciously scrambled to assemble a competing airpower infrastructure, sending Ottoman officers (documents even mention a certain Fifth Army lieutenant, Ferid Efendi, by name) to flight school in Europe and ordering aircraft from Bristol Aeroplane, originally the British Colonial Aeroplane Company, a corporate ancestor of BAE Systems.[86] The War Ministry even contemplated opening a pilot training school inside the Empire, but the cost was prohibitive.[87] Though the counterfactual scenarios are provocative to imagine, in the end the Ottoman government was too financially and geopolitically constrained to contest Italian airpower in the Libyan provinces.

By the same token, and even more consequentially, Italy's airpower theorists expected to operate in what Donald Rumsfeld would call a "target-rich

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[85] Thomas Hippler, *Bombing the People: Giulio Douhet and the Foundations of Air-Power Strategy, 1884–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–24.
[86] On the War Ministry's efforts to found an Ottoman aviation division and to purchase aircraft from British and French manufacturers see BOA HR SFR 3/656/1 (1912); BOA HR SFR 3/665/34 (1912); BOA HR SFR 3/665/108 (1912); BOA HR SFR 3/676/25 (1912). On Ferid Efendi's training in Europe see BOA DH MTV 48/6 (1912).
[87] BOA BEO 4005/300301 (1912); BOA BEO 4013/300924 (1912).

environment" a century later. In Ottoman Libya they instead encountered a perplexingly empty battlefield terrain. The Unionists and Sanusiyya operated as mobile guerilla units, not a standing army.[88] Military fortifications were at best "ephemeral," and strategically valuable civilian infrastructure was practically nonexistent. Though the Italians dropped hundreds of bombs through October 1912, their effect was nearly universally conceded to have been negligible: projectiles and the ordnance used to deliver them were still weakly designed, and the desert sand absorbed most of their impact. Moreover, as demonstrated by several unsuccessful attacks on Sanusi encampments, concentrated rifle fire could inflict serious damage on Italian aircraft. At best Italian pilots could tendentiously assert their terror bombings whittled away at enemy morale, but even here they reaped diminishing returns over time.[89]

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[88] For more on the airpower's lack of effectiveness in guerilla war see Grégoire Chamayou, *Drone Theory* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 60–72; Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
[89] Hippler, *Bombing the People*, 50–83. On debates within the Italian high command about the relative benefits of airpower see Andrea Ungari, "The Italian Air Force from the Eve of the Libyan Conflict to the First World War," *War in History* 17, no. 4 (2010): 403–434.
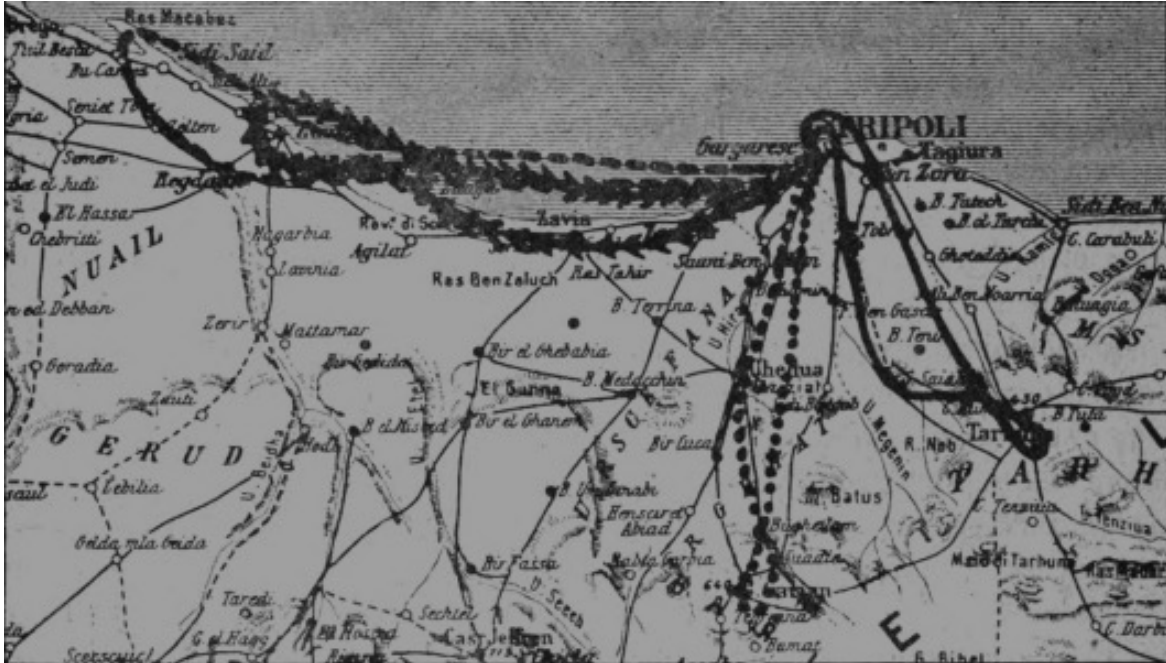
Figure 6: Long-distance ascents of Italian military dirigibles 1911–1912 Ottoman-Italian war, Leonardo Crosara, "Cronologia Aeronautica (Part 5)," *Rivista Italiana di Aeronautica* 12 (1917–1918)

The de facto airpower doctrine that evolved in response to these challenges— armed reconnaissance (*ricognizione armata*) in official parlance— attempted to turn these environmental disadvantages into strategic assets (Fig. 6). The endless deserts of Fezzan and Cyrenaica lacked high-value targets, but they also lacked natural cover of any kind, making Sanusi and Ottoman troop movements and easy to detect. The use of dirigibles for intelligence gathering and surveillance, occasionally supported by airstrikes during pitched engagements, remained an essential component of Italian counterinsurgency operations into 1913 and 1914, when they unsuccessfully attempted to subdue the resistance in Fezzan.[90] Aircraft also served a public relations function: after Rome opened a second front against the

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[90] See Leonardo Crosara, "Cronologia Aeronautica (Part 5)," *Rivista Italiana di Aeronautica* 12 (1917–1918) for a detailed but highly technical account.

Ottomans in the Aegean in summer 1912, Italian pilots littered the Eastern

Mediterranean, as far north as Adana, with propaganda leaflets.[91]

Figure 7: Aerial photo of Tibesti Mountains, southern Fezzan. Columbia University, Media Center for Art History, Special Collection, Libya during the Italian Colonial Period

Though Italy redeployed the majority of these resources to Europe during

the First World War, they returned to Libya with renewed sadism after the advent of

the fascist regime in the early 1920s. Higher quality aircraft purchased by the newly

constituted Italian Air Force (*Regia Aeronautica*)—which Mussolini oversaw

personally at the time— delivered food, ammunition, and medical supplies to Italian

soldiers and their Libyan collaborators, allowing them to push further south into the

interior than at in point in the previous decade. More reliable equipment also made

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[91] BOA DH MTV 18/40 (1912).

for better intelligence gathering, and aircraft assumed an ever increasingly

prominent role, generating high-resolution photographs and maps of the southern

regions that were especially crucial in the lead up to the Kufra invasion in January

1931 (Fig. 7).[92] In addition to attacks on Sanusi encampments, which had long since

become routine, Italy used its improved fleet to conduct drop poisonous gas and to

carry out a sort of traveling court martial, flying around disputed areas to conduct

show trials and summary executions. Punitive airstrikes against entire villages were

a common occurrence.[93]

       The fascist reconquest of Tripolitania and Fezzan was largely complete by

1928. Opposition leaders from the western coastal areas had mostly gone into exile

in Egypt and the Levant, and Fezzan's defiant resistance finally buckled under the

pressure of relentless air strikes and gas attacks, fleeing across the Sahara to Chad,

Niger, and Tunisia. In Cyrenaica, where popular support for the Sanusi Order was

strongest and where the environment did provide a degree of natural camouflage—

the Italians had particular trouble in the Green Mountain (Jabal al-Akhdar) region,

whose forested hills sheltered the insurgency and rendered it invisible from

above—the campaign would last three more grueling years. The Sanusiyya made

examples of any Italian pilots they captured in the Eastern Sahara, and their remains

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[92] See Rodolfo Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1932), 180 for aerial reconnaissance photos of Kufra. Elsewhere Italian documents confirm Rosita Forbes' assertion that the 1923 Hassanein map of Kufra (1:1,000,000 scale), which Rome obtained in facsimile from the Cairo Desert Survey Office in 1926, was critical for the planning of the invasion. See CDOIA, *Storia della cartografia coloniale Italiana*, 125.

[93] "Italian Air Men Bomb Cirenaican Oasis: Punish Rebellious Senussi Arabs by Dropping Explosives on Two Villages," *New York Times*, 19 October 1924.

were sometimes found totally dismembered or impaled on stakes.[94] With Graziani

at the helm, Italy's counterrevolutionary forces repaid that violence in kind many

times over.

In sum, the conquest of area and volume failed to achieve their goal of

overwriting the mediated space of the Sanusi commons with the bounded totality of

a forcibly unified colonial state. After two decades of intense conflict, the better-

equipped and *ascari*-fronted Italian military was unable to dislodge Sanusi fighters

from their entrenched positions in the Green Mountain and oasis *zawiya* compounds

of southern Cyrenaica. Where these approaches foundered, however, techniques of

perimetric enclosure succeeded with unparalleled brutality. As I argue below, a

cruder and more pedestrian technology, barbed wire, became the most effective

weapon in the Italian counterinsurgent repertoire, an icon of the violence inherent

to territorial spatialization that created the conditions of possibility for the

technical-scientific rendering of the Libyan colonial state.

Perimeter: Strategies of Enclosure from the *Reticolato Confinario* to Dar al-'Uqayla

In May 1931, Britain's lead geologist and surveyor in the Eastern Sahara,

Patrick Clayton, happened upon a threadbare Bedouin caravan near the

archaeological site at Jabal al-'Uwainat, a remote point in the Sarra Triangle where

Egypt, Sudan, and Cyrenaica meet.[95] After the fall of Kufra, this party of survivors

had trekked over 600 miles toward the Nile Valley, past the "bones of women,

children, horses, and camels strewn over the desert." Though the number of victims

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[94] Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, 197–201.
[95] See BNA FO 925/7889 (1925) for an early map.

could not be immediately ascertained, Reuters reported that the last group of its

kind to be rescued consisted of nineteen out of the original forty-two people. Word

of the suffering of Libyan refugees soon reached Karachi, where local activists, many

of them veterans of the Khilafat Movement who had followed these developments

closely for years, petitioned the League of Nations to intervene.[96]

Major demonstrations followed throughout the summer in Damascus,

Aleppo, Cairo, and Amman.[97] In December, at the World Islamic Congress in

Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni eulogized 'Umar al-Mukhtar as a revolutionary

martyr while Egyptian MP Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam, who fought alongside the

Sanusi during the campaign against Britain in 1915, compared Zionism favorably to

Italian colonialism.[98] Anti-Italian protests erupted as far away as Jakarta, where the

Italian Consul was "obliged to seek out police protection." Muslim communities

across Asia launched boycott campaigns, refusing to ride in Fiat taxis or cars fitted

with Pirelli tires. Allegations of mass imprisonment and indiscriminate airstrikes

conducted during the siege of Kufra sat atop their list of grievances.[99]

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[96] "Bedouins' Harrowing Trek Across Desert: Refugees from Kufra Oasis," *Times of India*, 27 May 1931.

[97] Italy Incurs Wrath of Islam in Palestine by Tripoli Policy, *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 June 1931

[98] "Italy is Criticized at Moslem Congress: Gathering at Jerusalem Recognizes Tripolitan Rebel as Martyr," *New York Times*, 16 December 1931; "Moslem Session Ends in Attack on France: Moroccan Delegate Says Paris is 'Doing Everything to Kill Islam and the Arab Spirit,'" *New York Times*, 17 December 1931. For background on the Congress see Nicholas Roberts, "Making Jerusalem the Centre of the Muslim World: Pan-Islam and the World Islamic Congress of 1931," *Contemporary Levant* 4, no. 1 (2019): 52–63; Weldon Matthews, "Pan-Islam or Arab Nationalism? The Meaning of the 1931 Jerusalem Islamic Congress Reconsidered," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003): 1–22.

[99] "Moslems Angry with Italy," *North China Herald*, 4 August 1931.

News of Italian war crimes spread quickly throughout the Muslim world, carried by pilgrims as they returned home from the Hijaz. The actual extent of the atrocities, however, remained largely unknown to all but their victims and perpetrators, guarded by an official conspiracy of silence well into the postwar years. The area-wide and volumetric strategies of counterinsurgency, which steadily overcame local resistance in Tripolitania and Fezzan, were largely ineffective in Cyrenaica, where the Sanusiyya constituted a social formation unto itself. The high degree of social cohesion in the eastern half of the country, reflecting its near total economic, cultural, and ideological absorption into the *zawiya* system, was compounded by the topographical features of the landscape: the valleys, caves, and juniper thicketed trails of the Green Mountain sheltered Sanusi guerillas from Italian airpower and the endless march of the *ascari*, and they ambushed colonial forces on an almost daily basis into 1931.[100] Graziani himself conceded as much, noting that the organized rebellion—known euphemistically throughout Egypt and Cyrenaica as the "government of the night"—was still in tact, even if it had been "mutilated by the serious blows it received."[101]

A unique eyewitness account of this period comes to us from Muhammad Asad, the legendary Muslim convert, translator, diplomat, philosopher, and father of anthropologist Talal.[102] Living for years in the Hijaz as a confidant of Ibn Saud, Asad became well acquainted with the Sanusi leadership in exile, particularly Ahmad al-

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[100] Ali Ahmdia, *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (London: Routledge, 2005), 41–42.
[101] Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, 16.
[102] For background see David Scott and Charles Hirschkind, eds., *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Sharif. In January 1931, at Sayyid Ahmad's behest, Asad travelled covertly across the

Red Sea, through Upper Egypt, and into southern Cyrenaica on an aid and fact-

finding mission to the last remnants of the Sanusi resistance, still under 'Umar al-

Mukhtar's command. By the time of his arrival Kufra had fallen, and the Italians

firmly held all the urban centers along the Cyrenaican coast, as well as a chain of

strategic checkpoints at the northern cusp of the Green Mountain. In these

tumultuous final days, Asad claims the Italian advance followed an eerily

identifiable pattern:

> A reconnaissance plane [would report] the presence of a tribal encampment by wireless to the nearest post; and while the machine guns of the plane prevented the people from dispersing, a few armored cars would come up, driving straight through tents, camels and people, indiscriminately killing everyone within range men, women, children and cattle; and whatever people and animals survived were herded together and driven north ward into the huge barbed wire enclosures which the Italians had established near the coast. At that time, toward the end of 1930, about eighty thousand Beduins, together with several hundred thousand head of cattle, were herded together into an area [that] did not provide sufficient nourishment for a quarter of their number; in result, the death rate among man and beast was appalling. In addition to this, the Italians were erecting a barbed wire barrier along the Egyptian border from the coast southward to Jaghbub in order to make it impossible for the guerrillas to obtain supplies from Egypt. The valiant Maghariba, under their indomitable chieftain, al-Ataywish—Umar al-Mukhtar's right-hand man— were still putting up a stiff resistance near the western coast of Cyrenaica, but most of the tribe had already been overwhelmed by the superior numbers and equipment of the Italians. Deep in the south, the Zuwayya tribe…was still fighting desperately despite the loss of their tribal center, the Jalu oases. Hunger and disease were decimating the Beduin population in the interior.[103]

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[103] Muhammad Asad, *The Road to Mecca, 4th Edition* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 322–323.

In the opening lines of his remarkable history of barbed wire, philosopher Reviel Netz observers, "It is through the prevention of motion that space enters history," citing private property, prisons, and borders.[104] The gradual introduction of this rather crude, even antiquated technology to the Italian counterinsurgent repertoire in from 1929 to 1934, signaling dominion over perimeter in addition to area and volume, combined qualities of all three institutions. Italian forces dealt the Sanusiyya a critical blow at Kufra, and the Order never recovered enough to contest the occupation meaningfully again. Unfortunately for Graziani, however, the insurgency still had a base deep in the territory of a third-party country: as long as food, ammunition, and fighters, including many battle hardened exiles from Tripolitania, continued to trickle in from oasis depots in Western Egypt, a low intensity conflict would go on indefinitely on the Green Mountain.[105]

The smuggling problem was nothing new, but it intensified, or at least became more immediately distressing, as the Italians began to focus their undivided attention on Cyrenaica in 1928 and 1929. Disorder along the frontier owed partly to the fact that trafficking contraband had become a profitable business for Italian nationals living along the coast: Graziani vociferously condemned the "private gluttony" of these traitors, "corrupted by the Sanusi Hydra," who had been racially and morally compromised by their time in the colony: such "Levantinization" was

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[104] Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), xi.
[105] See Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile, and the Emergence of a New Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 2010) for background on Tripolitanian exile politics.

the worst of all possible fates.[106] These perverse incentives were further

complicated by an effective Anglo-Egyptian policy of non-cooperation. Unwilling to

upset the Egyptian population by appearing to collaborate with the Italians, officials

in Cairo, who had still not ratified the 1925 treaty demarcating the Egyptian-

Cyrenaican border, refused to throttle the "transhumance of rebels to and from

Egypt."[107] Graziani mused that he would have liked to occupy Siwa and Sollum in

response, and certainly would have done so had he been Roman Proconsul two

thousand years earlier.[108]

     The solution he devised instead was even more "radical," as he put it. As

Graziani was preparing to return to Benghazi from the massacre at Kufra, he relayed

his idea to Rome through Governor of Cyrenaica Pietro Badoglio. He proposed to

cover the length of the Egyptian border, 300 kilometers down the 25th Meridian East

from Port Bardia to Jaghbub, with a barbed wire barrier, and to complete the

enclosure of the Green Mountain from the south by occupying all the westbound

roads from Siwa to Jalu (Fig. 8). This massive border fence would be garrisoned at

three large forts (Forts Cappuzzo and Maddalena, and a third instillation outside

Jaghbub) and six smaller redoubts, each connected by telephone lines to the coast. It

would also host three airfields and a permanent armada of reconnaissance planes.

Italian technicians began conducting the preliminary research while Graziani laid

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[106] Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, 220–222.
[107] Ibid, 222–224. On the Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1925 see Matthew Ellis, *Desert Borderland: The Making of Modern Egypt and Libya* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 175–188.
[108] Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata,* 224.

waste to Kufra, formally breaking ground on the project in April 1931 with logistical

oversight from civilian firm Sicelp.[109]

Figure 8: "Border Fence," in Rodolfo Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, 225

Graziani, a profoundly arrogant character, took great satisfaction in this

engineering marvel, accomplished (as he endlessly bragged) at minimal cost to the

Italian taxpayer. The steppe region between Port Bardia and Jaghbub offered few

natural resources. Water supplies for the workers and their military escorts—as

well as the amounts used to mix concrete blocks to support the iron posts around

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[109] Ibid, 225.

which the barbed wire itself would be wrapped—had to be transported overland by cars that routinely broke down from the stress. Working straight through the summer months, when daytime temperatures never fell below 37C in the shade, barrier construction crews used enough cement to build a bridge from Italy to Albania across the Strait of Otranto; enough iron rods to connect Benghazi to Syracuse by cable; enough imported water to fill a small manmade lake; and, incredibly, enough barbed wire to encircle the earth one and a quarter times at the equator. In accordance with cost saving principles, the main labor force of 2,500 was composed entirely of imprisoned Libyans. Properly motivated by the *ascari's* whip, they completed the work at lightning speed, in time to ensnare 'Umar al-Mukhtar in September 1931.[110]

The source from which these figures are adduced, Graziani's memoir of the eastern campaign, begins with the stunning invocation: *Ai caduti, per la conquista della Cirenaica, dedico questo pagine, che consacrano il loro olocausto*—"I dedicate these pages to the fallen in the conquest of Cyrenaica, that I might consecrate their sacrifice" or, somewhat more literally, "their holocaust."[111] There is a grotesque irony to these lines, written by the architect (along with Pietro Badoglio) of a world-historic campaign of mass murder, not to honor his victims, but to memorialize Italian soldiers killed in the process.

Italy had aspired since 1911 to develop viable agricultural settlements in Libya in order to redirect the flow of southern peasants to the Americas. For years this project of transforming emigrants into colonists was an abject failure. Though

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[110] Ibid, 225–229.

[111] Ibid, dedication not paginated.

the fascist regime confiscated huge tracts of land traditionally held in common in the 1920s, the majority of those plots fell under private ownership, with a handful of tobacco concessionaries employing a mostly indigenous workforce (supplemented by penal convict labor) on sprawling latifundia style estates. By the end of 1931, the settler population was a meager 429 individuals.[112] Less than a decade later the situation changed dramatically, as the Agency for the Colonization of Libya (*Ente per la colonizzazione della Libia*) began to shuttle thousands of Italian families across the Mediterranean (in 1938 they numbered 20,000–30,000). This vast demographic settlement enterprise was indirectly facilitated by the same technology that cut the resistance off from its Egyptian lifelines: using the perimetric strategy of barbed wire enclosure, now taking the form of concentration camps (*mu'taqalat*) along the Cyrenaican coast, Graziani's forces systematically depopulated the eastern half of the country to make way for an army of Italian "farmer-warriors."[113]

The rounding up of the Sanusi insurgency's Cyrenaican social base began in the fall of 1929, before the construction of the frontier barrier, and continued until 1934.[114] In the summer of 1930, Italian forces started to clear rural communities from the Egyptian border zone, the Cyrenaican oases to the north of Kufra, and the Green Mountain, herding them towards remote, barbed-wire-fortified (*shabardag*)

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[112] Claudio Segrè, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 299.

[113] Emanuele Ertola, "'Terra Promessa': Migration and Settler Colonialism in Libya, 1911–1970," *Settler Colonial Studies* 7, no. 3 (2017): 340–353; Roberta Biasillo and Claiton Marcio da Silva, "The Very Grounds Underlying Twentieth-Century Authoritarian Regimes: Building Soil Fertility in Italian Libya and the Brazilian Cerrado," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63, no. 2 (2021): 366–399.

[114] Ali Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (London: Routledge, 2020), 81.

concentration camps in the remotest areas of Sirte, far away from any sympathetic population centers, potable water, or shelter from the elements. Most of the victims, over 100,000 civilians, crossed overland in death marches they referred to collectively as *al-rihlan* (we might translate this figuratively as "the trail of tears") (Fig. 9). Though the Italians deported smaller numbers across the Gulf of Sirte, on rickety ships this was only slightly less treacherous than the 1,100 km journey on foot. Many collapsed of exhaustion along the way, their remains simply discarded in the Eastern Sahara.[115]
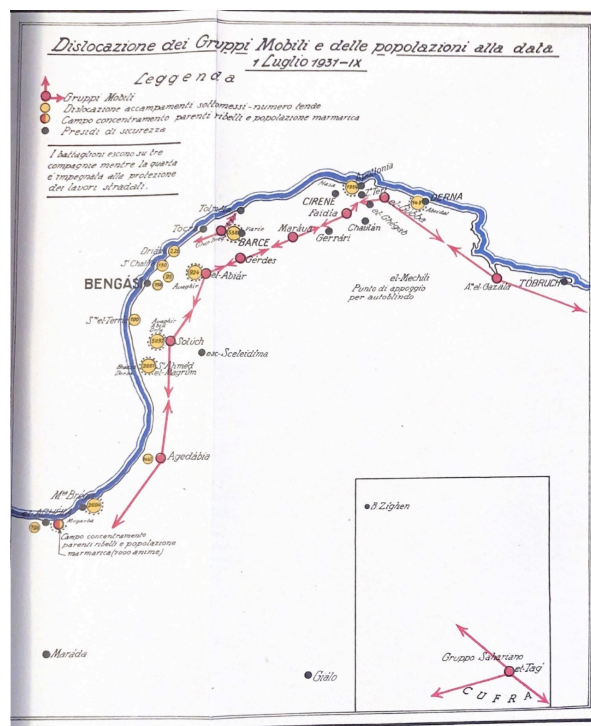

Figure 9: Cartographic itinerary of *al-rihlan*, the Italian depopulation of Cyrenaica, July 1931. Dar al-'Uqayla is shown in the bottom left (Graziani indicates that 7,000 were interned there at the time). Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, 105 (verso)

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[115] Ibid, 50–74.

Though there were sixteen camps in total, the Italians detained the majority of the victims—upwards of seventy percent—in four notoriously horrific facilities that Ali Ahmida justifiably refers to as "death camps": Braiga, Magrun, Slug, and Agaila. The latter, otherwise known as Dar al-'Uqayla, the Libyan Auschwitz, functioned as a warehouse for the large extended families of captured Sanusi insurgents. Conditions in the camps—Ahmida has excavated the details through painstaking survivor interviews and detailed examinations of Eastern Libyan oral traditions—were exterminationist by design. The Italians tried to make examples of Sanusi leaders by executing them in public spectacle lynchings, as in the case of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, who Graziani hung at the Slug camp before a crowd of 20,000 assembled specifically for the occasion on 16 September 1931. The majority of the victims, however, died from forced labor, exposure, starvation, refusal of medical attention, or abuse by the *ascari* guards and their Libyan accomplices. Prohibited from bathing, their clothes reduced to rags, and deprived of even meager food rations, they were quite literally left out in the elements to rot, slowly and in agony.

Ecological devastation was a central part of the procedure. As they depopulated rural Cyrenaica, the Italians confiscated enormous herds of livestock belonging to its indigenous tribal communities. The absolute destruction of the region's native animal wealth—85 percent of its sheep and goats and 60 percent of its cattle and camels were slaughtered by 1933—partly explains the staggering mortality figures in these years: 60,000 to 70,000 civilians died in the Italian camps,

with an overall population decline of 83,000, nearly half the prewar figure.[116] Of the

small number of young Cyrenaican Bedouin who survived the experience, many

were forcibly acculturated and conscripted against their will into Libyan *ascari*

battalions.[117] The catastrophic success of these interment and settlement policies

furnished the Nazi colonial regime in Eastern Europe with a useful template for the

"organization and regulation of a new Volksgemeinschaft at the edge of [its]

empire."[118]

    In addition to these international and too-often overlooked reverberations,

the strategy of perimetric subjugation had critical knock on effects in the domain of

technical, scientific, and ideological representation. As I argued at the beginning of

this chapter, the architects of Italian counterinsurgency doctrine acted as the

vanguard of colonial geography by establishing the conditions under which Libya

could be apprehended cartographically and represented back to its own people, the

Italian population, and the wider world. The imaginative constitution of colonial

Libya through comprehensive measurement, map production, and the

dissemination of fascist geographical propaganda concluded a process of territorial

spatialization—economic, legal-diplomatic, military-strategic, and technical-

representational—that began nearly a century earlier with the Ottoman restoration

project of the early 1840s.

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[116] Ibid, 75–112. This ecocidal policy was a seamless continuation of the early
history of barbed wire, which was invented in 1874 for the express purpose of
immobilizing livestock on the American Great Plains. See Netz, *Barbed Wire*, 1–55.
[117] Nicola Labanca, "Italian Colonial Internment," in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller,
eds., *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 27–36.
[118] Patrick Bernhard, "Hitler's Africa in the East: Italian Colonialism as a Model for
German Planning in Eastern Europe," *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 1
(2016): 61–90.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: Mapping the Colonial State

Royal decree 698 of 18 May 1931 established the innocuously named Libyan

Government Research Department (*Ufficio Studi del Governo della Libia*) to

consolidate the work of two separate geographical offices then working

independently of one another in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania.[119] The regime assigned

several responsibilities to the new umbrella organization, including the "collection

and arrangement of material reflecting the history, geography, and ethnography of

the territory"; the organization and direction of "regular and expeditious

topographic surveys" in conjunction with the Minister of Colonies; the compilation

of maps and sketches for "various civil and military purposes"; and the publication

and circulation of research findings to the widest possible audience. Under the

guidance of Michele Checchi, a veteran colonial hand with twenty years of

administrative and scientific experience in Eritrea and Somalia, the Department

exceeded all expectations. Throughout the 1930s, its staff worked closely alongside

the IGM, relying heavily on input from the cartographic and reconnaissance

divisions.[120] The results of its survey missions, conducted by scholars and officers

stationed at the "remotest garrisons in Libya" (*studiosi e ufficiali dei presidi più*

sperduti della Libia), appeared most prominently in the semiannual *Geographical*

Bulletin (*Bollettino Geografico*), often accompanied by detailed maps of water

resources, communication lines, indigenous toponyms, and other features of the

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[119] Vittorio Emanuele III, "Regio Decreto no. 698," 18 May 1931, reprinted in
Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno D'Italia, 22 June 1931. The Cyrenaica and Tripolitania
branches had been conducting research on behalf of the Ministry of Colonies
Department of Cartography since 1922 and 1926 respectively. See CDOIA, *Storia*
della cartografia coloniale Italiana, 100–101.
[120] Vittorio Emanuele III, "Regio Decreto no. 698."

human and natural landscape. The Department's indisputable crowning achievement was the completion and dissemination of the first 1:1,000,000 scale map of the entire colony (i.e. Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan), based on modern topographical and geodetic calculation techniques, in the early 1930s.[121]

The defeat of the Sanusi insurgency, piecemeal resolution of various border disputes with Britain and France, and administrative unification of the colony under "exiled" Air Minister Italo Balbo in December 1934 unleashed a torrent of data collection and cartographic representation.[122] Though the formation of the *Ufficio Studi* reflected a metropolitan desire for greater efficiency and an integrative rationalization of the colonial bureaucracy, it hardly had the geo-topographical market cornered. From 1932 to 1935, General Nicola Vacchelli—an enthusiastic fascist and towering figure in Italian geography who chaired half a dozen national and international geographical institutes, including the IGM, at various times— organized eight expeditions of his own to rural Tripolitania and Fezzan, collecting a dizzying array of naturalistic and social scientific information.[123] Later in the decade, the SGI oversaw several additional missions to the Eastern Sahara, which covered a similarly wide array of subjects including anthropology, biology,

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[121] CDOIA, *Storia della cartografia coloniale Italiana*, 102–103.

[122] For a detailed report on the border issues—outstanding with respect to French Equatorial Africa since Istanbul claimed the Lake Chad Basin as a sphere of influence in the late nineteenth century—and their diplomatic resolution see W.B.K. Shaw, "International Boundaries of Libya," *Geographical Journal* 85, no.1 (1935): 50–53. For background on Libyan administrative unification under Balbo see Segrè, *Fascist Life*, 291–333.

[123] Nicco La Mattina, "Writing Ottoman and Italian Colonial Libya: Intelligence Gathering and the Production of Colonial Knowledge," *Hesperis Tamuda* 55, no. 2 (2020): 123–153. For background on Vacchelli's life and career see the editor's obituary in *Geographical Journal* 81, no.1 (1933): 92–93.

parasitology, and, of course human, and physical geography. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, the sheer volume of these expeditions was such that two colonial survey parties might easily have crossed paths in a remote corner of Fezzan or Cyrenaica entirely by coincidence.[124] The Italian overseas project may have begun "without a map" during the liberal period, but by the second decade of the Mussolini era it had developed an internally coherent "spatial epistemics" of its own, accumulating and standardizing colonial geographic knowledge and making it widely available for mundane popular consumption.[125]

In this scramble to quantify, collate, and represent every social and environmental detail, there was seldom pause for reflection about what exactly the state ideological-geographical apparatus was mapping. The canvases produced by the dense institutional matrix of the IGM, SGI, Colonial Ministry, Libyan Government Research Department, and their countless subsidiaries were not pure "mimetic representations," or value neutral "statements of facts about the earth's surface."[126] Likewise, the colonial territory reproduced ad nauseam in regime media (stamps, postcards, films) was not an immutable object waiting since time immemorial to be catalogued scientifically and depicted graphically, but the recent product of a long and rapacious counterrevolutionary war. Above all it was the subjugation and physical removal of the indigenous population—what I have described as Graziani's geometry of counterinsurgency—that enabled the "geographical appropriation" of

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[124] Atkinson, "Politics of Geography," 78–80.

[125] Laura Lo Presti, "The Cartographic Lives of the Italian Fascist Empire," in Presti et al., eds., *Mapping, Connectivity, and the Making of European Empires* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), 175–199.

[126] Raymond Craib, "Relocating Cartography," *Postcolonial Studies* 12, no.4 (2009): 481–490.

the territory through scientific measurement, just as it paved the way for the transformation of the landscape through Italian settlement and agricultural "reclamation."

As demographic colonization gathered momentum in the second half of the 1930s, the Libyan environment underwent even more radical transformations. With Cyrenaica denuded of its native population, the colonial government set about remaking the Green Mountain in the image of Umbria, the "green heart of Italy." In practical terms, this meant deforestation, eradication of indigenous plant and animal species, and their replacement with eucalyptus blocks, olive groves, wheat fields, and vineyards, alongside the introduction of Italian livestock and fertilizer. In 1933, the colonial administration allowed 35,000 survivors of the concentration camps to return to their original villages, where they were forced to work as farm laborers on Italian plantations and on the construction crews for Balbo's grand, never-ending infrastructure projects (most notably the coastal highway running from the Tunisian to the Egyptian border).[127]

The production of Libyan state territorial space, from the drawing of its borders and mapping of its terrain down to the transformation of its soil at the molecular level, required the enclosure of the Sanusi commons and effacement of the Unionist vision for alternative Ottoman modernity in the Sahara, articulated most compellingly by Mehmet Nuri Conker and Mahmut Naci Balkış. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the architects of the counterinsurgency operated as

[127] Roberta Biasillo, "Socio-Ecological Colonial Transfers: Trajectories of the Fascist Agricultural Enterprise in Libya (1922–43)," *Modern Italy* 26, no. 2 (2021): 181–198; Biasillo and Silva, "The Very Grounds Underlying Twentieth-Century Authoritarian Regimes."

an organic—which is to say, *organizing*—vanguard of geographical innovation for the duration of the conflict, establishing the conditions of possibility for the scientific measurement and representation of the colony. The annals of colonialism in the Greater Middle East offer few more conspicuous examples of dominance without hegemony than this, achieved at monumental human and ecological costs and totally unsustainable in the long run. Graziani's morbid creation, *Libia Italiana*, was marked from the beginning as a space of unspeakable oppression, but the legacies of Ottoman developmentalism and Sanusi resistance were just as deeply ingrained. They remain hardwired into territorial Libya's physical and political landscape down to the present.

CONCLUSION:

BOOMERANG EFFECTS

Following the Second World War, the British Foreign Office and US State Department established the Joint Allied Intelligence Agency to microfilm Italian documents seized by Allied Forces Headquarters, including Mussolini's private papers. The material contained on these reels is diverse as it is revealing of Italy's colonial ambitions in the Maghreb, Northeast Africa, and Southwest Asia. In the span of a few frames, the document cache veers from counter-espionage programs in Libya and clandestine operations in Palestine to commercial activities in Yemen and consular dispatches from French Somaliland (Djibouti), providing a synoptic picture of the fascist approach to empire.[1] Amid reams of police reports, diplomatic communiqués, newspaper editorials, political cartoons, and propaganda leaflets, one especially noteworthy item stands out: a 1938 Arabic language polemic roughly thirty pages in length, published in Damascus by the Committee for the Defense of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (*Jam'iyyat al-Difa' 'an Tarabulus-Barqa*, CDTC) and attributed to Bashir al-Sa'adawi, titled *The Atrocities of Italian Fascist Colonialism in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica* (*Faza'i al-Isti'mar al-Itali al-Fashisti fi Tarabulus-Barqa*, hereafter *Atrocities*).

Born in Khums in 1884, al-Sa'adawi descended from a long line of Tripolitanian notables. His grandfather was a famous and respected *katib* who mediated between Istanbul and Sheikh al-Jalil during the rural uprisings of the

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[1] United States National Archives, "Official Records of Italian Government Agencies (1922–1944)," film 4528, reel 409, frames 3790–4082.

1830s and 1840s (see chapter 1). In his youth he studied Quran and Islamic sciences at a Sanusi *zawiya* before matriculating at Hamidian primary and secondary schools. There he fell under the influence of a progressive-minded *hoca* and began to ingest Unionist ideas alongside the works of the great Islamic modernists. In his early twenties, al-Sa'adawi entered the Ottoman administration in Khums before moving on to a more prestigious assignment in Tripoli. After the revolution in 1908, he became one of the first public figures to recognize the Italian threat, organizing a boycott of the Banco di Roma.[2]

Able to move seamlessly between the urbane circles of the coast and the hinterland worlds of the Sanusiyya and western upland tribes, al-Sa'adawi naturally stepped into a leadership role after the Italian invasion. After a layover in Palestine in the wake of the 1912 surrender, he was recalled to Istanbul, where he developed close ties to Enver Pasha and other CUP heavyweights. From 1913 until the outbreak of the Great War, he was deputy governor of the Sancak of Rize on the Black Sea. With wartime mobilizations underway, he returned to Istanbul and developed a relationship with the loosely affiliated federalist circle led by Cami Baykurt, Yusuf Akçura, and Ahmet Ferit Tek (see chapter 2). By the second year of the conflict, the CUP government assigned him to a new post as *kaymakam* of Yanbu al-Bahr outside Medina, which he fled on pain of death after refusing to defect to the Sharifian side in summer 1916.[3]

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[2] For biographical detail on al-Sa'adawi see Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial Legacy, Exile, and the Emergence of a New Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 2010), 78–81; Miftah Ghouita, "Al-Diblomasiyya al-Misriyya wa al-Munadil Bashir al-Sa'adawi, 1945–1952," *Misr al-Haditha* 19 (2020): 231–260.
[3] Ibid.

As the war drew to a close, al-Saʿadawi returned to Istanbul, made contact

with Ahmad al-Sanusi (who fled Cyrenaica for the capital in August of the same year:

see chapter 3), and unsuccessfully lobbied Ottoman negotiators to bring Italy's

occupation before the Paris Peace Conference. Failing this, in September 1920 he

returned home to arbitrate disputes between rival western tribes and broker a bi-

regional agreement on national unity between leaders in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

These activities came to an abrupt halt with the advent of the fascist regime and

resumption of counterinsurgency operations, and al-Saʿadawi was forced into exile

once again. After short stays in Alexandria and Beirut, he settled finally in Damascus,

where the CDTC pamphlet was published in 1938. As the guerilla struggle pressed

on, he became the de facto leader of the Tripolitanian exile community in the

Eastern Mediterranean, securing its place on the worldwide Muslim anticolonial

agenda at the 1931 Jerusalem Islamic Congress (see chapter 4) while defying repeat

Italian assassination attempts.[4]

I raise the question of al-Saʿadawi and his text at this late point for several

reasons. His biography and family history exemplify many of the themes that shaped

the production of territorial Libya: Ottoman restoration and provincialization, the

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[4] Ibid. On al-Saʿadawi's later political career, including his time as an advisor to an
aging Ibn Saud and high-profile role as chair of the National Congress Party in
creating a federal structure for postcolonial Libya under the monarchical leadership
of Idris al-Sanusi see Adrian Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations: A
Case of Planned Decolonization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). After a
number of setbacks for his party, and amid accusations of incitement, he fled Libya a
final time, landing in Saudi Arabia early in 1952. He died of a heart attack in Beirut
five years later. The British government, which had frequently been at loggerheads
with this tireless radical, seemed to relish the fact that he "had largely been
forgotten...[appeared] to have left no following, and of close relatives only an
obscure nephew." See BNA FO 371/126067 (25 January 1957).

Hamidian and Sanusi educational networks, exile, resistance to foreign occupation, and the struggle over geography at the end of empire. He was among the first antifascist activists to document Italian war crimes in Libya in all their brutality. Likewise, his reflections on the origins and spread of fascism anticipated several important postwar critics. Yet above all I believe al-Sa'adawi merits attention because of his unique insight into the continuities and ruptures that characterized Libyan territorial spatialization in the late Ottoman and colonial periods.

Throughout *Atrocities*, al-Sa'adawi 's explores a question still hotly contested today: what *is* fascism? His answer bears many of the hallmarks of the Comintern line on the German and Italian dictatorships. Fascism is the counter-revolution, the terrorist dictatorship of finance capital (*ru'us amwal bankiyya*), the true face of an international exploiter class (*al-tabaqat al-mustathmira*), which has lifted its flimsy veil of democratic credibility. But most fundamentally, he insists, prefiguring Hannah Arendt, C.L.R. James, and Franz Fanon, fascism is a byproduct of the colonial idea (*fikrat al-isti'mar*), a "boomerang effect" of predecessor imperialisms, as Césaire memorably put it two decades later. Under the global dominance of the financial bourgeoisie (*burjwaziyya bankiyya*), large monopolies hunted endlessly for raw materials, cheap labor, and new opportunities for investment as their productive capacities outgrew domestic markets. The illiberal, often shockingly violent colonial policies that developed to meet these demands prepared the way for the emergence of this frightening new political movement, a regime of "tyranny, repression, and violence, whose sole objective is expansion through exploitation."[5]

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[5] Bashir al-Sa'dawi, *Faza'i al-Isti'mar al-Itali al-Fashisti fi Tarabulus-Barqa*

The contrast al-Saʿadawi draws between the fascist menace (in Libya and worldwide) and the Ottoman administration he served in its final years could hardly be starker. In the nineteenth century, he claims, the local population "enjoyed the same rights as all other subjects of the Ottoman Empire (*ahali al-Mamlakat al-ʿUthmaniyya*)." Indeed, he continues, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the people of provincial Libya enjoyed special privileges, including extensive internal autonomy. Seldom did they feel there was any meaningful difference between themselves and the Turks (*al-atrak*), since the fraternity of Islam was their lodestar, a principled solidarity among Muslims that "reconciled their hearts and united them in defense of their own destinies." Under the influence of this mutual accord between Arab and Turk, things "followed their natural course." National strife (*al-tanahar al-qawmi*), he maintains, was virtually unknown to the Ottoman Empire prior to the declaration of the constitution, when the noisy din of Turanism (*al-naʿarat al-turaniyya*: see chapter 2) overcame certain misguided Turks. But, this

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(Damascus: Jamʿiyyat al-Difaʿ ʿan Tarabulus-Barqa, 1938). For the Comintern line see Roger Griffin, ed., *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold, 1998), chapter 4 "The Terrorist Dictatorship of Finance Capital." On Comintern influence in the region see Vijay Prashad, *Red Star over the Third World* (New Delhi: LeftWord, 2017); Jens Hanssen, "Communism in the Middle East and North Africa: From Comintern Parties to Marxist-Leninist Movements," in Amal Ghazal and Jens Hanssen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Middle Eastern and North African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 197–224. On Césaire and his contemporaries see Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review, 2000); Liam Liburd and Paul Jackson, "Debate: Decolonising Fascist Studies," *Fascism* 10, no. 2 (2021): 323–345; Leslie James, "What Lessons on Fascism Can We Learn from Africa's Colonial Past?" *Africa is a Country*, 24 January 2017.

insidious ideology never took root in provincial Libya, so warm relations between the two parties remained intact.

On top of this, the Ottomans made special provisions to exempt its Libyan subjects from compulsory military service (*al-jundiyya al-ajbariyya*) and relieved their tax burdens: if taxpayers were short in any given year, the imperial state covered the balance from its own coffers in Istanbul (*sunduq al-Astana*). Likewise, the Ottoman government went to great lengths to educate its people, establishing modern primary, secondary, and industrial schools and bringing promising students up to the capital for first-rate instruction in medicine, administration, agricultural techniques, and military science. It compelled large banks to lend to the region's farmers at zero interest, exempted certain tribes from the census and livestock taxes, and established hospitals and philanthropic foundations. Overall, he concludes, the people of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica enjoyed a free and dignified life, "no less so than the residents of Istanbul themselves."

Atrocities is a multifaceted text, equal parts record of Italian criminality, theoretical intervention on the nature of fascism, and anticolonial nationalist *cri de coeur*. As the author's (perhaps overly charitable) reflections on the bygone empire of his youth attest, it is also a deeply personal account of territorial spatialization in all its economic, legal-diplomatic, military strategic, and imaginative dimensions. Given his intimate familiarity with the tribes of upland Tripolitania, al-Sa'adawi was undoubtedly well acquainted with Istanbul's history of disarming, displacing, and dispossessing many of the indigenous communities of the rural interior. As an alumnus of a Sanusi *zawiya* and veteran of the brotherhood's insurgency from its

earliest days, he also clearly invested significant hope in the Ottoman state, seeing it

as the most likely guarantor of a prosperous future for the land of his birth. Its

disappearance, timed to coincide precisely with the rise of fascism, marked a break

with the past, but one that was forever incomplete, as the resilience of Ottoman

networks and preservation of Ottoman-era solidarities into the 1920s

demonstrates. Here I can only concur with an emerging critical position that

attempts to rethink Italian fascist colonialism—and the fascist phenomenon more

broadly— through a post-Ottoman lens.[6]

Summary and Implications

This dissertation has argued that the production of territorial Libya was a

century-long process that unfolded across a vast Saharan-Mediterranean theater

from the Istanbul's ouster of the Karamanlı dynasty to the bloodstained conclusion

of the fascist counterinsurgency in the early 1930s. A history of territory in the

making, the present study has described territorial spatialization as the cumulative

effect of economic, military-strategic, legal-diplomatic, and techno-scientific

dynamics shaped in turn by the interaction of multiple transregional networks:

Saharan, Ottoman, and European. Beginning with the "invention of Ottoman Africa,"

I investigated the production of Ottoman provincial space in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica,

and Fezzan from the end of Mahmud II's reign to the advent of the Hamidian regime

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[6] See Andreas Guidi, *Generations of Empire: Youth from Ottoman to Italian Rule in the Mediterranean* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022 [forthcoming]); Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Nicholas Danforth, "An Ottoman Map of Nazi Europe," *Afternoon Map*, 5 October 2013.

in 1876. Critiquing traditional Tanzimat historiography—which continues to view the mid-nineteenth century as a period of mimetic reform initiated after the Empire's "discovery" of universal Europe—I described the emergence of a robust, internally-initiated Ottoman project for Libya, concocted by an improbable assemblage of liberal-minded Ottoman technocrats, local comprador-bourgeois elements, and transnational financial institutions. Seeking to transform the region into a "pump for capital," this nebulous coalition embarked on an ambitious reconstruction program centering on administrative standardization and infrastructure development underwritten by foreign direct investment. Crystalizing in the late 1840s and 1850s, this program made Ottoman Libya an early testing ground—a "pilot province"—for policies enacted subsequently in other imperial frontier regions. Though provincialization was a modest success, it came largely at the expense of tribal communities in Tripolitania and Fezzan: indeed, the process only began in earnest after a twenty-year campaign of disarmament, dispossession, and forced settlement, establishing a pattern that came define political and social life in the region over the ensuing century. The material construction of Ottoman provincial space in Libya also had an important ideological corollary: as the imperial liberal cartel pushed deeper into the Sahara, the ruling elite began to understand itself, for the first time, as "African" power. This "moment of Afrogenesis," I argued, shaped Ottoman politics just as profoundly as the "experience of European gnosis" so frequently invoked as the defining feature of the period.

Continuing to the turn of the century, I then examined the long, tumultuous reign of Abdülhamid II through the prism of his Libyan penal colony. Though many

of the developmentalist policies of the previous years continued apace under his administration, I argued that the consolidation of power around Yıldız Palace and intensification of geopolitical rivalries across Afro-Eurasia transformed the regional landscape in new and unexpected ways. Most notably, from the middle 1880s, provincial Libya was flooded with exiles from around the Empire—left radicals and national separatists, tribal outlaws, and white-collar Unionists from Istanbul— leading foreign and domestic observers to analogize "Tripoli" to the Imperial Russian gulag, a "Saharan Siberia" for a "Red Sultan." Following a group of seventy-eight high-profile CUP activists banished to Libya after a foiled coup plot in 1896, I showed how the commercial, strategic, and political-legal imperatives of territory intersected with the burning questions of the Empire's domestic politics—seditious conspiracies and the indefinite deferral of constitutional governance—making the region a volatile flashpoint of several overlapping conflicts. With their paradoxical Turanist and federalist leanings, many of the Libyan exiles rehabilitated after 1908 would form an important counterhegemonic bloc at the twilight of the Second Constitutional Period, and continued to influence the course of politics in North Africa and Anatolia for years after the Ottoman collapse (as I suggested above, their imprint on al-Saʿadawi is self-evident, notwithstanding his denunciation of Turkish supremacist thought and its pernicious effects in other corners of the Empire).

Pivoting east from Saharan Tripolitania and Fezzan, I went on to examine the most important social force in the wider region, the Cyrenaica-based Sanusi Order. For the imperial grand strategists and race-mongering conspiracy theorists of the late Victorian era, the Sanusiyya posed a rising Islamist threat, not just to European

designs in Africa, but the entire edifice of white world domination. Likewise, for postcolonial nationalists across the formerly Ottoman world, it was an anticolonial, proto-national, and perhaps commendably xenophobic social movement established to oust European interlopers from Islamic lands. Modern critical scholarship has often fixated on the Order's credentials as an embryonic "state" in an otherwise anarchic or "under-territorialized" outback. I rejected each of these frameworks in favor of a spatial analysis centering on the *zawiya*, the small religious community model I described as the cellular form of the nineteenth-century Saharan social formation. Examining daily life inside these frontier communities, I argued that the brotherhood had a relational understanding of social space, akin to rights on commons, which it consistently tried to preserve through peaceful means. For most of its history, the Sanusi Order favored avoidance protest over violence, retreating into the desert whenever it felt pressured by the Ottoman state, whose imperial and spiritual authority it never attempted to usurp. By the turn of the twentieth century, colonial propaganda became a self-fulfilling prophecy: partnering with the precariously positioned Ottomans, the Sanusiyya reluctantly embraced armed militancy in response to French and Italian encirclement around 1900. After the Great War, the brotherhood continued the struggle to restore its antebellum autonomy, waging guerilla campaigns against multiple European armies while shaping other post-Ottoman national struggles as far away as Anatolia.

Finally, I examined the strategic and techno-scientific dimensions of the territorial spatialization in the Sanusiyya's two-decade "small war" against liberal and fascist Italy. I began with readings of key Unionist and Italian colonial

descriptions of the landscape in order to illustrate the competing visions and imaginative geographies of these two "weak links" in the imperial chain—as Poulantzas would have it—on the eve of the 1911 invasion. CUP elites had their own modernist designs on the region, a still inchoate progressive agenda to revitalize Saharan commerce and promote Islamic solidarity under the Ottoman banner. The Italians, by contrast, sought to impose a Euclidean rationality on the former Ottoman provinces, to overwrite the mediated space of the *vilayet* and Sanusi commons with the reticulated gridlines of a settler-colonial state. Italy's plan to unify Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan forcibly—an anomaly in the post-Ottoman world, where population transfers, ethnic partitions, and other "states of separation" dominated—encountered stiff resistance from the outset. Deeply embedded in the social landscape of the Sahara and able to draw on material support from across the Eastern Mediterranean and African interior, the Sanusiyya used small raiding parties and "Bedouin" tactics to spectacular effect for years.

Responding to these challenges, as well as the unique difficulties posed by the militarized natural environment, Graziani and the other architects of the "pacification campaign" developed a three-dimensional strategy to secure the would-be colony's area, perimeter, and volume. The area-wide and volumetric aspects of Italian counterinsurgency doctrine, defined respectively by the substitution of Northeast African *ascaris* for metropolitan soldiers and the widespread use of airplanes for "armed reconnaissance" and terror bombings, produced meager results. Most of inland Cyrenaica remained openly defiant twenty years after the first Italian landing. Where they failed, however, the perimetric

strategy of barbed wire enclosure succeeded with a precision equaled only by its brutality, as Graziani's forces systematically depopulated the eastern half of the country to make way for an army of Italian settler colonists. In colonial Libya, I argued, the counterinsurgent-as-geographer thus prepared the way for the geographer-as-field- scientist, creating the conditions of possibility for the surveying, mapping, quantifying, and cataloguing of the territorial state.

Keeping with the worldwide pattern described by Charles Maier in the introduction to this study, "communities we used to label casually as nomadic or tribal"—whether in Fezzan, the upland interior regions of western Tripolitania, or the desert oases of southern Cyrenaica—seem to have born the social and ecological brunt of the seismic transformations just described, from Ottoman provincialization to Italian colonization. How can we reconcile these harsh continuities with Bashir al-Saʿadawi's nostalgia for the halcyon days of Turco-Arab *convivencia* and Islamic solidarity around the turn of the twentieth century? Certainly much is at stake in this overdetermined question—not least the Ottoman Empire's own imperial bona fides and the fates of the diverse mobile subject populations who once resided within its domains. There is no reason to view the Ottoman past through rose-tinted lenses, to absolve or excuse Istanbul for its ruthless handling of the rural Tripolitanian uprisings of the 1840s and 1850s or the callous manner in which it deported the Hemvend Kurds to Cyrenaica en masse, to take two noteworthy examples. Yet we must also avoid false equivalences that place so-called "Ottoman orientalists" and their haughty contempt for the unwashed masses of the provinces on the same terrain as an invading power like fascist Italy, which regarded Bedouin

251

mobility as an existential threat to its settler-colonial enclosure project and responded to the Sanusiyya's insurgency with a scorched-earth campaign of ethnic cleansing. As the Sanusi example clearly demonstrates, successive Ottoman governments tended toward pragmatism, and even forged durable alliances with tribal power at the frontier. But more than this, to cite Selim Deringil in defense of al-Sa'adawi, a son of Khums and Sanusi pupil who ascended the Ottoman administrative hierarchy and became an antifascist theorist in exile, these social forces operated "*within* the Ottoman system; Istanbul was not Gandhi's London or Ho Chin Minh's Paris—it was *their* city."[7]

At the centennial of the Italian occupation in 2011, Libya once again became a key transregional locus of imperial intervention. The NATO-led regime-change war—now infamous for its wanton attacks on civilians, destruction of civil infrastructure, purposeful and murderous neglect of refugees, and complicity in (often explicitly racist) atrocities committed by rebel forces—effectively dissolved the Libyan state.[8] Yet, as Stuart Elden cautions, every episode of deterritorialization is accompanied by simultaneous process of reterritorialization.[9] By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that Ottoman antifascist Bashir al-Sa'adawi can provide us with useful intellectual resources to extract the rational kernel from the

[7] Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–342.
[8] Jeff Bachman, "Libya: A UN Resolution and NATO's Failure to Protect," in Karim Makdisi and Vijay Prashad, eds., *Land of the Blue Helmets: The United Nations and the Arab World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 212–230; "In Libya, African Migrants Say They Face Hostility," *National Public Radio*, 25 February 2011.
[9] Stuart Elden, "The State of Territory Under Globalization: Empire and the Politics of Reterritorialization," in Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Mattias Kärrholm, eds., *Territories, Environments, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2022), 15–36.

mystical shell of this overwrought concept, historicize the violent

deterritorialization of the Libyan state, and make sense of the process through

which something new is being established on its ruins.

Much like the fascist counterinsurgency of the 1920s and early 1930s,

NATO's intervention was characterized by aerial terror, including US signature

"double-tap" strikes, and has left a massive collection of mercenaries and foreign

volunteers from around the Sahara and Mediterranean in its wake.[10] At the same

time, against the backdrop of an unprecedented migration crisis, new geographical

imaginaries and strategies of confinement are coming into view. As the liberal

International Crisis Group busied itself with the question of "how Libya's Fezzan

became Europe's new border," the Italian government created a new "mobility

regime"—a patchwork of detention centers, refugee camps, and carceral islands—to

surveil and control men and women who, in many cases, are leaving the former

Italian colonies of Northeast Africa (Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia). Thus, as

Stephanie Malia Hohm points out, "These are people for whom Italian empire

continues to saturate, directly and violently, the subsoil of their lives."[11] The

militarization of the European Union's borders has primarily served to empower

militias involved in fuel, arms, and human trafficking while nourishing a regime of

extortion and forced labor that "both traps immigrants in Libya and pushes them

[10] Horace Campbell, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya* (New York: Monthly Review, 2013). NATO itself openly acknowledges the mercenary problem, if not its role in creating it. See Alia Brahimi, "Libya Has a Mercenaries Problem," *Atlantic Council*, 21 May 2021.

[11] International Crisis Group, *How Libya's Fezzan Became Europe's New Border* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2017); Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire's Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy's Crisis of Migration and Detention* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

towards Europe." Big business, Italian industrial agriculture in particular, has

benefitted enormously from this flow of cheap energy and hyper-precarious

workers.[12]

Ankara, for its part, has hardly been a passive bystander, seeing in Libya a

pillar of the AKP's so-called neo-Ottomanist foreign policy agenda and bridgehead

for Turkish participation in the New Scramble for Africa. As then Foreign Minister

Ahmet Davutoğlu remarked before a 2011 conference of the Turkish Hearths (the

same organization founded by Hamidian era exiles Yusuf Akçura and Ahmet Ferit

Tek in 1912):

> It is not a mere coincidence, on the centennial anniversary of the
> Tripolitanian War, that Turkey is again at the center of the Libya issue,
> helping its Libyan brothers. We see Libya's problems as our own
> problems…We carry the legacy of broad horizons, at every corner lie our
> buried martyrs. Next year will be the centennial anniversary of the Balkan
> Wars. 2014 is the centennial anniversary of the WWI, in other words, the
> emergence of these borders between Turkey and Syria, Iraq and the
> Caucasus has no geographical, cultural, and demographical foundation. Just
> as the state [meaning the Ottoman Empire], which was the political center of
> an ancient civilization, was torn apart in twelve years from the Tripolitanian
> War in 1911 to 1923, and foundational elements of this state were
> psychologically and historically divided, only to be replaced by a new
> Republic founded in 1923 as a nation state and the leftovers of this heritage
> took on the mission of "order," conveying to the World certain values, now
> we need to unify the elements of this broken and fragmented nation again. e
> question is how do we unify this geography? How do we build a new
> generation, who can shape the flow of history marching towards the future
> with a great hope from these divided histories? Therefore, "Towards the
> Great Turkey" is the right title [meaning the title of the conference].[13]

[12] Lucia Pradella and Rossana Cillo, "Bordering the Surplus Population across the
Mediterranean: Imperialism and Unfree Labour in Libya and the Italian
Countryside," *Geoforum* 126 (2021): 483–494; Lucia Pradella and Sahar Taghdisi
Rad, "Libya and Europe: Imperialism, Crisis, and Migration," *Third World Quarterly*
38, no. 11 (2017): 2411–2427.
[13] Quoted in M. Hakan Yavuz, *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-
Ottomanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 186–187.

Post-2011, Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan have become insurgent geographies once more. As a key Afro-Eurasian geopolitical flashpoint and bellwether of enduring global instability, the "middle of nowhere" remains the "heart of the world." State failure, accumulation by dispossession, relentless aerial violence, mercenary war crimes, and the creation of security architectures to monitor and curtail the movement of "suspicious" populations: all of the above are boomerang effects of an earlier era of territorial spatialization, residues of a colonial history which, far from being dead, is not even past.

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