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Eventful Transformations: *Al-Futuwwa* between History and the Everyday

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A special correspondent for the leading Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* wrote from Alexandria on 28 May 1936: "One of the effects of the Al-Bosfur night-club murder in Cairo is that its circumstances have led to an interest in the problem of '*al-futuwwat*' [sing., *al-futuwwa*] and how much power and influence (*al-saṭwa*) they have in the capital and in other Egyptian cities."[1] The murder referred to was that of a popular singer and dancer, Imtithal Fawzi, by a band of assassins led by failed businessman and weight-trainer Fuad al-Shami. I argue here that this murder can be read as an instance of a larger event, which might be inscribed in the following way: a moment that irrevocably branded the public figure of *futuwwa* with the additional meanings of thug, mobster, and nefarious villain—*balṭagi.* This is not the conventional way of registering this moment; indeed, the modern transformation of *al-futuwwa* is rarely considered as a historical event. It is not my aim here to affirm or deny the outcome of this transformation, nor am I suggesting that the normative conception of *al-futuwwa* as an Islamic ideal of masculinity had never before had any negative connotations. Rather, I posit—and want to interrogate—a

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[1] Similar reports on the Imtithal Fawzi murder revealing to the public the *futuwwat* as characters not extinct as was believed can be found, inter alia, in: *Ruz al-Yusuf* (28 May 1936): 4; *Al-Musawwar* (5 June 1936): 28–29; *al-Hisan* (6 June 1936): 4–5; *al-Matraqa* (6 June 1936): 10.

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changed historical relationship in the constitution of *al-futuwwa*, in which the nature of history itself was radically transformed and contributed to the formation of a new politics and a new subject of politics.[2] As part of the hegemonic rise of this field of politics and its subject, history typically shows, or simply presumes, that other life-worlds, like that of the *futuwwat* and their particular form of power, were rendered exceptional and ultimately obsolete. In a larger project from which this article is drawn, I explored the gendered constitution of that new cultural and political hegemony. I labeled the gender norm that emerged at the intersection of colonial modernity and nationalism as *effendi* (bourgeois) masculinity, which I located in a new constellation of practices and discourses around the desirable, modern body. The present essay is in part an effort to de-center this bourgeois figure and the terms of its narration, which I unwittingly reproduced in the original study by rendering the event of the *futuwwa*'s transformation as a bit part within a larger story of ostensibly greater national and historical import.[3]

In the passage quoted above, the daily paper's use of the term *al-saṭwa* as opposed to *al-sulṭa*—typically used to signify official authority—was not a neutral description of a reality that was already given. Rather, it was a performative remaking of the social and political, as it alludes to and restates an understanding of the embodied and local power of the *futuwwat* as corrupt and criminal. The reiterative and diffuse structure of the performative, however, should caution us against declaring the death of the subject marked by *al-futuwwa*, and push us instead to think about the valences of possible re-significations.[4] In what follows, I elaborate on these points, and draw out their spatio-temporal and gendered dimensions through a closer reading of the murder of Imtithal Fawzi and an analysis of contemporary reactions to it.

On the evening of 22 May, Imtithal Fawzi appeared on stage at the Bosphorus nightclub to perform her regular dance number, when suddenly a

[2] This relationship between disciplinary formations and the subject has been considered under the sign of colonial modernity and as effects of power. For the latter, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); for the former, Tani Barlow, ed. *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Also see David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); and *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004). Colonial modernity is broadly conceived here to signify a historical condition in which new terms of discourse were violently installed that effected and constrained the future possibilities of the subject, the political, and the social in colonized (and metropolitan) areas.

[3] This essay is also a segue into a new research project that will examine the discursive and everyday iterations of *al-futuwwa* as another location from which the story of Egyptian modernity might be told and that might, in turn, retell the story of *al-futuwwa*. The study of the *effendi* is Wilson Chacko Jacob, "Working Out Egypt: Masculinity and Subject Formation between Colonial Modernity and Nationalism, 1870–1940," Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2005 (Revised manuscript forthcoming from Duke University Press).

[4] A wide-ranging essay, grounded in medieval sources with a brief foray into modern times, that makes a similar point albeit in a very different manner is Robert Irwin's "Futuwwa: Chivalry and Gangsterism in Medieval Cairo," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 161–70.

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commotion arose outside and the lights went out.[5] During the confusion this caused inside the club, Imtithal was stabbed to death with the sharp end of a broken bottle. In the ensuing investigation and press coverage of the incident, it was revealed that Imtithal had also been attacked the week prior to her fatal stabbing. At that time she had in fact appealed to the police for protection but was told that the police were not paid to protect the people but to solve crimes after they happened. It was also revealed that she had reported to the police that a gang of *futuwwat* was trying to extort protection money from her. Although it was not enough to save her life, Imtithal's accusation did make the apprehension of the gang members a relatively easy task for the police. The one who had stabbed the dancer, Husayn Ibrahim Hasan, was prevented from escaping by the other men in the nightclub. According to *al-Ahram*, he finally confessed to his part in the murder and also exposed his accomplices, who the police eventually rounded up.

The story that was finally pieced together from the various testimonies collected by the police detectives was quite astonishing and held the reading public in thrall for several months. The mastermind behind this team of thugs, Fuad al-Shami—a clever, attractive, well-dressed, and well-built young man—had been in trouble with the law numerous times before. At one point *al-Ahram* compared his criminal mind to the best of those in the infamous gangs of Chicago. Al-Shami had devised an extortion racket in which the dancers in his area were placed under close surveillance and if any of them entered into a relationship with a man, they would be required for their own "protection" to pay his gang a certain fee. If they did not pay willingly, both lovers were punished properly.

Al-Ahram alleged, as another example of Fuad's genius, that he had egomaniacal designs to control all of Cairo. Apparently, one way he disposed of competition from other *futuwwat* in areas into which he was interested in expanding his operation was to involve the unwitting assistance of the state and the law. In one particular case, he wanted the protection money from a nightclub that was already guaranteed "safety" by another *futuwwa*. Fuad befriended the rival *futuwwa* by giving him a suit as a present, while at the same time he had a member of his gang tell the police that clothing had been stolen from his house. The police were tipped off on the day the man wore the suit and they arrested him for robbery. When Fuad was called in as a witness on the rival *futuwwa*'s behalf, he denied ever having known him, and the man was sentenced to a term in jail.

When the dancer Imtithal Fawzi first refused to cooperate with Fuad al-Shami's scheme, he gave her a warning: Fuad's close friend Kamal al-Hariri

[5] There was extensive coverage of this case in all of the major Egyptian newspapers and magazines. Unless otherwise noted, the information for this section was gleaned from a series of articles appearing in *al-Ahram* from 24–28 May 1936. Only direct quotations are cited.

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was dispatched to rough her up, after which Imtithal—still refusing to pay—sought police protection. The following week, Fuad arranged for her to have an accident. His men disguised themselves in *galabiyya*s and turbans, bought and consumed two bottles of *zabib* (raisin-liquor), and set out to murder Imtithal.[6] The plan they carried out was to start a fight in the nightclub to distract attention from the dancer, at which point Husayn Ibrahim extinguished the lights and stabbed her with a broken bottle.

Most press accounts depicted this case as a serious indictment of the ability of the police to maintain law and order. *Al-Ahram* condemned their callous response toward Imtithal Fawzi's pleas for help: "Many police officials believe that they are not charged with the responsibility of protecting the people, only the ministers and rulers. They are ignorant of the fact that the law which commissions them to protect the minister is the same law which assigns them to protect the actress; for she and the minister from this perspective are equal before the law."[7] Apparently in response to the significant press coverage of police negligence in preventing this crime, everyone from the Minister of Interior to the Chief of Police for the Cairo province became involved in the investigation. The public outcry resulted in a dragnet operation to bring in all those reputed to be a *futuwwa*. Indeed, in an interview following the trial, Fuad al-Shami made a point of blaming the media frenzy for the harshness of his life sentence to hard labor.[8] Under this same pressure, the police chief established a new unit to deal specifically with crimes committed by the *balṭagi*s and *futuwwat*, modeled on other specialized branches that investigated, for example, pickpockets, bank robbers, and car thieves. One of this new unit's first acts was to open a register to record brief biographies for every *balṭagi*/*futuwwa* operating in Cairo, and compile details of their profit-making rackets and their hideout locations.[9]

At this point, there are a number of different directions in which a historical investigation could proceed. A study interested in crime, the law, and modern policing efforts might examine the relevant juridical archives seeking to demonstrate, inter alia, the new responsibilities of the state and/or its enhanced capacity for violence. A sophisticated political history might inquire into the formation of a public sphere in Egypt, questioning the Habermasian formulation of it as a domain of rational discourse. An urban historian could fruitfully explore the spatial reorganization of Cairo from the last third of

[6] The *galabiyya* is a long, loose robe that was still worn by a majority of the population in the 1930s. The cut, color, material, and other variations distinguished among the class, gender, and ethnicity of the wearer. However, in the emerging public culture of the interwar period, the *galabiyya* became an undifferentiated marker of "tradition."

[7] *Al-Ahram* 24 May 1936, 12.

[8] *Al-Musawwar* 9 Oct. 1936, 16.

[9] I was unable to verify in the archives how long this department was active and whether its records are still extant.

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the nineteenth century onward and show how the *futuwwa*'s increased national visibility was a product of this new geography, which effected a division along traditional and modern lines with specific spatial and social forms germane to each. A historian of gender might investigate the ways in which this case does or does not evince nationalism's claim to represent all of the subjects within its domain. Indeed, the only study I know of that has analyzed the Imtithal Fawzi case argues—by comparing the contemporary press coverage of this murder to that of murders of other female entertainers/prostitutes from earlier in the period—that the "imagined community" of Egypt did in fact expand to encompass more kinds of subjects.[10] Although all of these directions would lead to more knowledge of this period in Egyptian history, none of them would force us to question our understanding of *futuwwa* as thug, and consequently all would miss the opportunity to arrive at any other narrative of Egyptian politics than a certain recursive tale of political modernity. The violence of the modern's constitution in the past would be repeated in the present.[11]

I raise these hypothetical research agendas because nearly all of the previous scholarship on the concept and figure of *al-futuwwa* has concentrated on the "classical" period of Islam (ninth through thirteenth centuries C.E.). From these philological studies, we learn that its first usage dates to approximately the second century of the Islamic calendar (eighth century C.E.) but that its genealogy is extremely hazy.[12] Some say *al-futuwwa* originated as a mystical path of enlightenment and righteous conduct elaborated by Sufi masters, but it could also have been the label for urban social formations of various kinds: some with highly ritualized practices focused on enhancing fraternity and conviviality, others possibly related to guilds and the artisanal trades, and still others associated with the policing of particular neighborhoods or even the distant borders of *dar al-islam*.[13] As a concept, *al-futuwwa* is contradictorily capacious, accommodating such notions as chivalry, courage, generosity, brotherhood as well as thuggery, banditry, criminality, and depravity; furthermore, it might signify a warrior, an ascetic, or a gift.

[10] Shaun T. Lopez, "The Dangers of Dancing: The Media and Morality in 1930s Egypt," *Comparative Studies of South Asia and the Middle East* 24, 1 (2004): 97–105. Overall a stimulating study, the evidence however does not support Lopez's claim (p. 102) that Fuad al-Shami confessed to Fawzi's murder.

[11] For an analysis of how this problematic has burdened critique and the social sciences, see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[12] The term *futuwwa* is derived from the Arabic root *fata* (pl. *fityan*), meaning young man or boy, and the cognate literally approximates "youthful masculinity." The plural of *futuwwa* is *futuwwat*. The possession of *futuwwa* is sometimes rendered as *fatwana*.

[13] Al-Sulami's *Kitab al-Futuwwa* from the early eleventh century was probably the first formal treatment of the idea as a form of Sufi practice or *al-taṣawwuf*. For an interpretation distinguishing between *futuwwa* organizations and guilds, see Gabriel Baer, *Egyptian Guilds in Modern Times* (Jerusalem: The Israel Oriental Society, 1964); and Part III, "Turkish Guilds," of *Fellah and Townsman in the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1982).

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The meticulous work of Claude Cahen and other orientalists leaves us with a few intriguing propositions about *al-futuwwa* and the itinerary by which it came to Egypt.[14] The name was applied at one time or another in classical Islam to signify a path of self-cultivation, a mode of personhood, and a form of collective organization with varying religious, social, political, and economic consequences. It seems that there were always multiple histories inscribing and inscribed by *al-futuwwa*, its representation contingent on the location of the author historically and geographically as well as a relationship to temporality that oscillated between varying shades of the sacred and the profane. The high courtly form of *al-futuwwa* inaugurated by the Abbasid Caliph al-Nasir was said to have passed on to Mamluk Egypt after the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258. However, the institution became extinct in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries and survived only in the form of relatively weak rituals (e.g., the bestowal of the 'garment of the *futuwwa*'—in Baghdad these were apparently trousers [*sirwal al-futuwwa*]).[15] Nevertheless, there are indications that pre-existing popular urban groupings of young men (perhaps *aḥdath*?) and craftsmen in Cairo took on aspects of *al-futuwwa* that insured its reproduction in a new context, if not in new texts, until the modern period.

Perhaps because of *al-futuwwa*'s disappearance from the text and ambiguity in the social context, historians of modern times have treated it generally as a footnote to their preoccupation with the more serious work of explaining the "passing of traditional society" and evaluating the implications of modernity in the Middle East. It is used to mark that transition either through its seemingly obvious existence "out of time" or in its disappearance because of time.[16] However, *al-futuwwa* has yet to be narrated as an event in its own right with

[14] Some of the major texts are: Claude Cahen, "Futuwwa," in, H.A.R. Gibb, et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Islam II* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, c. 1960–), 961; "Mouvements Populaires et Autonomisme Urbain dans l'Asie Musulmane du Moyen Age" (in three parts), *Arabica* 5, 3 (1958): 225–50; 6, 1 (1959): 25–56; and 6, 2 (1959): 233–60; "Note sur les debuts de la Futuwwa d'An-Nasir," *Oriens* 6, 1 (1953): 18–22. Louis Massignon, "La 'Futuwwa' ou 'pacte d'honneur artisanal' entre les travailleurs musulmans au Moyen Age," *La Nouvelle Clio* 4 (1952): 171–98. G. G. Arnakis, "Futuwwa Traditions in the Ottoman Empire: Akhis, Bektashi Dervishes, and Craftsmen," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12, 4 (Oct. 1953): 232–47. Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 153–84. Along with Cahen, Franz Taeschner is the leading authority on *al-futuwwa*. Unfortunately most of his work is in German and hence was inaccessible to this reader.

[15] Franz Taeschner, "Futuwwa—Post-Mongol Period," in, H.A.R. Gibb, et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of Islam II* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, c. 1960–), 966.

[16] See, for example, Amira Sonbol, *The New Mamluks: Egyptian Society and Modern Feudalism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000); André Raymond, "Quartiers et Mouvements Populaires," in *Political and Social Change in Modern Egypt*, P. M. Holt, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968): 104–16; Jacques Berque and Mustafa al-Shakaa, "La Gamaliya Depuis Un Siècle: Essai d'histoire sociale d'un quartièr du Caire," Extrait de la Revue des *Études Islamiques* 42, 1 (1974). See also Susan Staffa, *Conquest and Fusion: The Social Evolution of Cairo, A.D. 642–1850* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977); and Pascale Ghazaleh, "The Guilds: Between Tradition and Modernity," in, Nelly Hanna, ed., *The State and Its Servants: Administration in Egypt from Ottoman Times to the Present* (Cairo: American University in Egypt Press, 1995), 60–74. For a very different

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a 'before' and 'after,' that is more than an effect of the temporal structure of a given modernity. The present inquiry[17] asks of this event the following questions: What is the significance of the slippage between *futuwwa* and *balṭagi*, on the one hand, and the distinction between *futuwwa* and *effendi*, on the other, for conceptions of the modern subject and politics? Who was the "public" that was making new claims on the state and that in turn the state was ostensibly trying to placate?[18] How do gender and space figure (in) the former? How would the displacement of the notion of *al-futuwwa* from the liberal discourse of law and order change its historical figuration and how might this alter our conceptualization of political modernity and of history?

A recent study of how the experience of modern law was narrated in Egyptian novels of the early twentieth century alludes to another distinction through which *al-futuwwa* appears in modernity: speech versus writing.[19] Reading a set of texts broadly categorized in, or related to, the pulp fiction genres, Elliott Colla illuminates the emergence of an ambivalent space of representation within Egyptian modernity, in which legal practice and novel writing were two intertwined "mediatory innovations." He suggests that the abstraction required in both mediations was a new concept of society, which authorized the speaking subject: "[p]olice and defense lawyers, attorneys and judges." However, this new role of "speaking for others before the law" was represented in novels as riven with anxiety over its performance. Colla relates this anxiety to a perception among the *effendiyya* ("lettered class" in Colla's translation) of "...the gap between the 'enlightened' theory of modern (European) law in colonial Egypt and the often irrational and unjust practice of that theory."[20]

approach that treats the analogous phenomenon of *javanmardi* in the contemporary Iranian context, see Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[17] This is only a very preliminary attempt to think about the narrative possibilities (un)available for a historical figuration of *al-futuwwa*. On the relations among event, structure, narrative, and temporality, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Keith Tribe, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). For an eloquent example of this kind of historiography, see Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[18] Imtithal Fawzi's own career points to the increasingly contested nature of "the public" and "public morality" in the 1930s. In 1933, Imtithal had been arrested, tried, and fined a L.E. 1.50 (∼£1.50) on the charge of public indecency during a performance. Imtithal, however, refused to pay the fine and appealed twice until the ruling was eventually reversed. The article ends by suggesting that her dancing at the victory party would have earned her a fine of a L.E. 100! *Al-Malahi al-Musawwara* 6, 3 (7 Nov. 1933): 6–7.

[19] Elliott Colla, "Anxious Advocacy: The Novel, the Law, and Extrajudicial Appeals in Egypt," *Public Culture* 17, 3 (Fall 2005): 417–43.

[20] Ibid., 419. For a brilliant new study that demonstrates how the "enlightened" produced and depended on the "irrational and unjust" in the constitution of modern law, see Samera Esmeir, "The Work of Law in the Age of Empire: Production of Humanity in Colonial Egypt," Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2006.

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Of most interest to my argument is Colla's reading of a somewhat peculiar staging of this *effendi* ambivalence towards legal representation in the form of a memoir from the 1920s attributed to a *futuwwa*, Yusuf Abu Haggag.[21] He renders *futuwwa* as *fitiwwa*, and translates the latter as "street thug" in order to be true to the colloquial register in which the memoir was composed. Indeed this is perhaps the most accurate transliteration and translation of the term in this context. However, the slippage between the formal and informal languages (marked orthographically only in transliteration) goes without comment except to reaffirm the social divide between polite and impolite society apparent within the distinction. Ironically, an anthropological study of *al-futuwwa* from the 1970s makes no reference at all to this distinction in speech and writing.[22] It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine this problematic, but it would be productive to consider how the difference between *futuwwa* and *fitiwwa* might be expressed in terms of the difference between the pedagogic and performative registers of identity formation.[23] Indeed, it is my contention that only as "an incessant shuttle" between them can *al-futuwwa* be translated without being assimilated into a universal grid of intelligibility; the semantic and social range of *al-futuwwa* extends beyond crime, courtrooms, and middle class anxieties of representation, and when its translation is limited to the register assigned by its interlocutors alone the production of *futuwwa* as subject is lost to history.

In the 1930s, it was precisely the slippery nature of the concept *futuwwa* as it mapped onto individual biographies, or its failure to do so, that presented a

[21] Yusuf Abu Haggag, *Mudhakkirat fitiwwa* (Memoirs of a street thug) (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-'Arabiyya bi-Misr, 1926), as cited in Colla, "Anxious Advocacy," 428. Colla suspects this text was authored by an *effendi* on the margins of the literary mainstream, since similar memoirs from this period were produced bearing the names of other outcast figures like prostitutes, orphans, and maids who were unlikely to write their own narratives (p. 429).

[22] The anthropologist Sawsan El-Messiri mapped the contemporary vectors of *al-futuwwa* when it converges with, and diverges from, a certain normative conception of the native Cairene. See El-Messiri, "The Changing Role of the *Futuwwa* in the Social Structure of Cairo," in, Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury, eds., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); also, *Ibn al-Balad: A Concept of Egyptian Identity* (Leiden, 1978). For a very different kind of speech act situation in which *fitiwwa* is invoked as a form of adulation, see Kristina Nelson, "Reciter and Listener: Some Factors Shaping the Mujawwad Style of Qur'anic Reciting," *Ethnomusicology* 26/1 (January 1982): 41–47, specifically p. 43.

[23] Useful discussions of this difference are: Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in, Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291–322; and Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). On performativity and subject formation, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Drawing on her ethnography of an Egyptian women's piety movement, Saba Mahmood has insightfully engaged Butler's theorization of performativity, showing its limits when confronted with ethical practices that do not presuppose a liberal subject and a political horizon of freedom. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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conundrum for contemporary commentators. For the Cairo Police, still a relatively British-dominated institution even after Egypt's nominal independence in 1922, the *futuwwat* represented a longstanding menace to colonial policing efforts, and they were presented as an obstacle to realizing the ideals of modern governance. Their authority was criminal in nature as Russell Pasha, the commander of the Cairo Police from 1918 to 1946, notes in his annual report for 1935, written at the same time as the furor over the murder of Imtithal Fawzi exploded in the press. According to Russell, there were two kinds of criminals who became repeat offenders. The first category, he claimed, he was able to understand; crime for them probably seemed the only option when the hardships of life exceeded a certain threshold of tolerance. He was less forgiving of the second category:

> There is however another class of recidivist who deserves no mercy and who forms a serious menace to public security in the cities and that is the professional rough or strong man who lives by threatening and assaulting other people. Such "osbagia" have always existed in the Ezbekia and Bab el Sharia Districts and have always given the police a lot of trouble as they are incurable criminals who are unaffected by sentences of fine which they easily pay or by short sentences of imprisonment which are no deterrent to this class of man. The existing Law on Suspects and Vagabonds is the only weapon the police have for dealing with these pests and it is, as it stands, of very little use. Last year this Command proposed to the Ministry a number of modifications of this Law to make it effective; unfortunately nothing has yet been done to improve this Law.[24]

Russell Pasha understood the first category of offenders not because of his natural sympathy for the urban poor but because it was legible within the prevailing discourse of crime and criminality.[25] And because this kind of criminal was a product of concrete social forces, the category was situated clearly within history and thus potentially transformable in time. The "*osbagia*" (a term which overlaps with *futuwwat*), however, was conceived as an ontology existing timelessly, and since crime was in their blood, so to speak, they presented an intractable problem for the police and the law. Russell seems to have believed that only if the law could better recognize *futuwwat* then his efforts to rid the city of them would be successful. This pragmatic approach to the "problem," however, failed to register how recognition was to be achieved; ostensibly, this labor would be performed a year later with the establishment of the new crime branch and the cataloguing of all of Cairo's professional roughs and strong men.

Fuad al-Shami and his gang certainly fall into the category of "*osbagia*" with which Russell Pasha seemed to have so much trouble. But if in the aftermath of Imtithal Fawzi's murder the vigorous pursuit of this kind of criminal was indeed combined with a process of classification and recording, the

[24] The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO) FO 371/20126, File J7532, Annual Report of the Cairo City Police for 1935.

[25] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1979).

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cross-dressing undertaken by Fuad's gang, supposedly from a modern style into a seemingly eternal *futuwwa* aesthetic (by donning the *galabiyya* and turban—a costume worn by the majority of Egypt's male population at the time) and back again, called into question the ability of colonial power to know and consequently capture and eliminate this figure.

There is an interesting parallel here with the earlier history of thugs in the Indian colonial context. In her interesting reading of *thugee* as a performative site that resisted easy assimilation into a colonial epistemology, Parama Roy writes:

> The thug, through his capacity for disguise and impersonation and his skill at negotiating multiple and competing identities, usurps the colonizer's privilege of complex subjectivity and of movement between subject positions and thus can be read to assume some control over both the construction and flow of colonial knowledge. So he never becomes fully naturalized as the disciplinary subject or, in other words, the knowable subject, of the colonial polity. And *thuggee*, later rewritten as dacoity, continues to function within the law-and-order context in the colonial and postcolonial state formations as a trope for the unruly and unreformable energies that cannot easily be accommodated to the needs of the civilizing mission.[26]

Thugee was constituted as a problem of knowledge and then was ascribed an ontology through and against which certain groups were understood, policed, and forced to negotiate. Roy's analysis also shows continuity between the colonial and postcolonial projects of knowing and governing these subjects.

A brief glance at the urban map of Fuad al-Shami's career track can add another layer to our understanding of the process by which *futuwwa* became a distinct object of the law. Fuad's illustrious life of crime started out in the modest neighborhood of al-Zahir. After being thrown out of his brother's house for his failure to reform himself, Fuad attempted to start his own business in al-Zahir. He opened a small bodybuilding salon, and things seemed to go well until a group of toughs made the salon their regular hangout.[27] Eventually the gym had to close because the constant fighting between the toughs scared away all the paying members, who had become fearful for their own lives.[28] Nonplussed by this setback, Fuad decided to harness the surplus energy of these men and venture in a new direction. He and his men declared themselves

[26] Parama Roy, *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 55–56. For another, anthropological approach that both seeks the limits to, and a mode of, engaging and making visible the otherness of violence performed by a figure bearing resemblance to the *futuwwa* and *thuggee*, see Pradeep Jeganathan, "A Space for Violence: Anthropology, Politics and the Location of a Sinhala Practice of Masculinity," in, Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan, eds., *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender, and Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[27] According to the senior head coach of the national Egyptian Weightlifting team, who had become interested himself in the sport in the late 1930s and became a world champion in 1950, these neighborhood workout spaces were quite common (interview with Kamal Mahjub at the Egyptian Weightlifting Association, 19 May 2002). Pictures of some of the greats of Egyptian weightlifting, including those of Mahjub, appear in Kamal Mahjub, *Tadrib rafa' al-athqal: al-mahara al-harakiyya* (Cairo: Dar Marjan li-l-Taba'a, n.d.).

[28] *Al-Ahram* 26 May 1936: 10.

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the *futuwwat* of al-Zahir.[29] They "protected" the owners of grocery stores, general goods suppliers, coffeehouses, and other establishments, who for the most part, already fearful of Fuad and his gang, willingly paid a monthly fee in exchange for the right to conduct their affairs without any trouble. Eventually, Fuad al-Shami felt confident enough to extend his business into the modern entertainment districts of 'Imad al-Din and al-Azbakiyya.[30] This was when his life trajectory intersected with that of Imtithal Fawzi's.

The movement of Fuad al-Shami's operation outward into "modern" Cairo and the ensuing entanglement with the state could be read as the impossible convergence of two different temporalities. His self-proclaimed status as a *futuwwa* might have remained unquestioned if he had limited his activities to al-Zahir. Ann Stoler has argued convincingly for an understanding of colonialism's bourgeois cultural underpinnings as fractured and for their location within an imperial geography that does not presume separate cultural spheres for the metropole and the colony. She shows how the colony was a central site for the production of the boundaries of a respectable whiteness. "Colonialism was not a secure bourgeois project. It was not only about the importation of middle-class sensibilities to the colonies, but about the *making* of them."[31] While Stoler's observations are about the culture of the colonizer, this same insight can be applied to the colonized. Negotiating a complicated field of racial, sexual, and spatial segregation within a colonial context, the Egyptian urban middle classes in the 1920s, and more vigorously in the 1930s, sought to fix the boundaries of *their* society. So it was certainly a cause for alarm when the symbols of membership in a club with seemingly ever-changing rules were so easily appropriated by an outsider—someone without "real" qualifications. If Fuad al-Shami had not acquired the competence to "pass" in respectable society, effectively confusing the categories of *effendi* and *futuwwa*, the outcry about the persistence of this (now) criminal underclass, "a state within a state," would have been less pronounced. To avoid confusion, I am not suggesting that in the person of al-Shami and his physical translocation in the city we have an example of the clash of tradition and modernity, but rather that this was one of many moments that performatively reestablished such a distinction.

[29] This was apparently a fairly typical trajectory for weightlifting enthusiasts who found other career paths closed to them. (Interview with Kamal Mahjub: It should be noted that he was uncomfortable making this connection and ultimately tried to re-position the *futuwwa* as a heroic figure.)

[30] Although signs of its declining status as an exclusive neighborhood were already evident with the rise of prostitution in the area during the War, when official recognition was granted to it as an acceptable area for the trade. TNA: PRO FO 141/466, File 1429 (Part I), 18 Apr. 1916, "Report of the Cairo Purification Committee's first meeting."

[31] Ann Laura Stoler, "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves," in, Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 90.

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Driving the rush to define, describe, historicize, spatialize, and differentiate among the *futuwwat* was a sense of anxiety over the unknowability of this concept, and perhaps also a desire to transform this impossible subject to an object of discipline. Underlying every attempt to capture the specificity of *al-futuwwa* was an inexorable sense of lack, and this was especially true in those descriptions that were seemingly the most thorough. By attaching the label to so many different types of criminals and criminality, the force of the concept was necessarily reduced. Some contemporaries understood the latter problem, but attempts to narrow the focus were beset by still other difficulties, as we shall see.

The appearance of Fuad al-Shami's smiling photo in the leading national dailies, wearing a handsome suit and projecting a virile, assertive personality, generated searching articles in a variety of newspapers and magazines into the history, culture, and meaning of *al-futuwwa*. For example, a major portion of the 5 June 1936 issue of *al-Musawwar* was devoted to the Imtithal Fawzi case and the phenomenon of *al-futuwwa*. One article, authored by "an expert privy to their secrets," is interesting for its attempt to define and differentiate among *futuwwa* and other types of criminal gangs.[32] This article leads with the claim that readers of the press—elite and commoner alike—came to learn of previously unknown bands of evil criminals only through the murder of Imtithal Fawzi.[33] "However, they were known to those familiar with the heart of the city—with its alleys and narrow lanes—and the outskirts and margins."[34] This "expert" faults the authors of other articles on the *futuwwat* for mistakes in reporting their numbers, interpreting who they really are, and describing their context.

He divides the criminal underworld into three categories of actors: *al-futuwwat*, *al-balṭagiyya*, and *al-barmagiyya*. The *futuwwat* are billed as the oldest of these groups. "They had their own despotic state with their own heroic figures. Their neighbors, the heads of noble houses, and merchants all feared them. They maintained their evil grip through the levying of protection fees."[35] In order to validate and ground this figure in a reality of sorts, the author runs through a list of notable *futuwwat* and the neighborhoods over which they exerted their authority. There was Ibrahim 'Atiyya of al-Husayniyya and his successor Mustafa 'Urabi, 'Abdu al-Gabbas of 'Abidin and Hara al-Saqiyin, Rizq al-Hashshash, Girgis bin Tuhtuha [?], and Mikhail al-'Aguz of the Coptic neighborhoods of al-Darb al-Wasi' and al-Darb al-Ibrahimi, al-Assiuti of al-Zahir, al-Fishawi, the female *futuwwa*

[32] Anonymous, "Ask Me about *al-futuwwat*, *al-baltagiyya*, and *al-barmagiyya*," *al-Musawwar* (5 June 1936): 28–29.

[33] *Al-Matraqa* introduces them—fixed with the label *al-balṭagiyya*—as a group "we had thought. . . had disappeared." *Al-Matraqa* 200, 15 (6 June 1936): 10.

[34] Anonymous, "Ask Me," *al-Musawwar*, 28.

[35] Ibid.

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'Aziza al-Fahla, al-Ziftawiyya, etcetera. But he is careful to point out that theirs was a legendary reality of the past ("*ayyam al-'izz wa al-jah*"), of which only traces remained in the author's present. It seems that by the 1930s the great battles that had once taken place between bands of *futuwwat* in the hills and wastelands bordering Cairo, and in the various alleys and quarters had been mostly forgotten. People no longer talked of those *kinds* of conflicts, except perhaps the butchers and blacksmiths of the abattoir quarter.

Then, as if the author suddenly remembered more, he tells of sporadic fights that would erupt between two, sometimes more, *futuwwat* of al-Husayniyya, al-Bulaqa, or al-Qabisi. The "last" famous incident in public memory, he says, was "probably" the battle between the gangs of Mustafa 'Urabi and al-Assiuti, which ended with the police intervening to save the former from a hailstorm of sand-filled bottles. He argues that it was when their "evil deeds" transgressed a certain limit that the colonial state unleashed its repressive apparatus to eliminate the *futuwwat*. The messy issues of how that limit was constituted when it was, and the deals that were certainly struck between state representatives and individual *futuwwa*, are not allowed to complicate the story.[36] It seems, though, that as much as the author wishes to relegate the institution of *al-futuwwa* to the dustbin of history, his own memory and present reality interrupt that narrative impulse. Thus, his desire to write the *futuwwat* in the past tense and to contain them within the grid of the traditional city leads him to anthropology.

Before moving on to the other two categories of criminal, he pauses to present an ethnographic sketch of the *futuwwat*, and provides a summary of "traditions" (*taqalid*) particular to their culture. They are represented as autarkic and stoic; that is, no assistance was to be sought from outside forces or institutions like the police or hospitals. A prominent locus of *futuwwa* culture was the *qahwa*,[37] a homosocial space ubiquitous in the popular quarters of the capital. The proprietors, especially of the *qahwa*s on the outskirts of these neighborhoods, were male or sometimes female *futuwwat*. The customers were generally "thieves, vagrants, and the like," who were usually known to the police and were often enlisted by them to help in criminal investigations. The drug trade had become the major source of revenue for most *futuwwat*, especially those joining from among the Sa'idi (Upper Egyptian) migrants to Cairo. But not all were from the poor or "*al-ṣa'alik*" classes; some possessed great wealth, owned land and property, and had lawyers and advisors who helped them avoid, or get out of, entanglements with the state.

[36] This overlap of "interests" is explored in Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*.

[37] He describes these cafes elsewhere as "traditional." Although this is one possible translation of the Arabic word *baladi*, the reader should be aware that conceptually this word envelops a complicated field of meaning in which both a spatial and temporal—and arguably a moral—alterity is figured.

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Unsuccessful in mapping the *futuwwat*'s history as absolutely other, the author then institutes their difference ontologically. Even as he speaks of various crossings into *al-futuwwa*, like the Sa'idi migrant or the thrill-seeking rich kid, he implies that there is an essence there unmediated by class or history, which must be there for the simultaneous projects of recognition and disavowal. It is this essential otherness that the author feels is a relic of the past, even as he knows that there were still instances of *futuwwa* activity in his present, but desires its return to the past or oblivion in the near future.

The rest of the article overlays the urban geography of "modern" Cairo with the coterminous histories of nightclubs, cafes, whorehouses, gambling dens, and their protectors. "The situation of the *barmagiyya* and the *balṭagiyya* developed in step with the development of the city."[38] The author associates the former criminal type with the early growth of the entertainment district in Azbakiyya at the end of the nineteenth century.[39] He delimits the boundaries of the Azbakiyya quarter (as of the 1890s) as an area extending from Midan al-Opera to Midan Kamil (Qantara al-Dikka) and stretching from Wajh al-Birka Street to al-Rawi'i to the edge of Bab al-Sha'riyya. "This quarter was a chain of clubs, meeting places, bars, dance halls, and gambling houses."[40] The most chic and popular section apparently ran from Midan al-Opera to Midan al-Khazindar. Its chief attractions were the Café Egyptien for music and the bars Drakatus [?], Veratus [?], and The New El Dorado for drinks. He points out that the "houses," bars, and clubs in this area were initially run almost exclusively by (unspecified) foreign women.[41] These women took as their companions toughs, who came to be called *al-barmagiyya*. The article embeds the split between the *barmagiyya* and the *balṭagiyya* within a nationalist and gendered urban chronology. As the author sees it, the history of the *balṭagiyya* was bound up with the shifting boundaries of the city's entertainment center from Azbakiyya to 'Imad al-Din, Alfi Bey, and Fuad Streets (then outward to Shubra and al-Zahir), and from female foreign ownership to female Egyptian ownership.

[38] Anonymous, "Ask Me," 29.

[39] Azbakiyya started out in the late fifteenth century as a wealthy suburb northwest of Fatimid Cairo, adjacent to the Nile port of Bulaq, with a man-made lake surrounded by the palaces of princes and leading merchants. In the nineteenth century it was absorbed into Khedive Ismail's Hausmannization projects to prepare Cairo for the grand celebrations he had planned for the opening of the Suez Canal. Janet Abu Lughod writes that beginning in the 1880s,". . . with colonial rule and the influx of large numbers of Europeans, this new portion of the city was increasingly marked off as a 'foreign' preserve. Azbakiyah, the center of the new city, contained over 56,000 inhabitants in 1917, of whom only under 14,000 were Egyptian Muslims!" *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 158.

[40] Anonymous, "Ask Me," 29.

[41] According to the author there were famous establishments known to "commoners and the elite" in other neighborhoods as well. He names 'Abidin, al-Isma'iliyya, and al-Tawfiqiyya.

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For this author, as for the Chief of Police Russell, the problem in the end was not one of knowledge alone—according to the former, all the criminal elements in society were already known to the police—but rather one of inadequate laws and inaction. In addition to new laws to make arrests and convictions easier, he advocates new legislation that would make known the identity of each and every Egyptian. He suggests this could be accomplished by issuing identity cards, as was the practice in other countries. Underwriting both of these proposals was a desire to normalize what was known about the members of Egyptian society, or what the author thought he knew; in other words, through the articulation of the police and the law, the line between legitimate and illegitimate political subjects could be reasserted and the modern rescued from undesirable crossings.[42]

Ultimately, however, as other interventions in the debate on the proper policing of the city and the phenomenon of *al-futuwwa* show, it was the perceived sense of unknowability that aroused the most concern.[43] If it was possible for a *futuwwa* to look and act like an *effendi* in every way, passing as respectable, then how was one to know the former? Another author, doing precisely what the author of the previous article protested against—carelessly mixing the categories of evil-doers—divides the criminal body into seven constituent parts.[44] These parts are not inscribed with the kind of historical or geographical specificity found in the previous article. For this author, the *futuwwat* and *balṭagiyya* were interchangeable terms used to describe the criminal gangs involved in protection rackets, drug trafficking, and prostitution.

The use of *ṭawa'if* in the title, "Aḍrar al-Madaniyya al-ḥaditha: ṭawa'if al-futuwwat wa al-*balṭagiyya*" (The perils of modern civilization: Orders of *futuwwat* and *balṭagiyya*), to group these actors is significant. In most other cases (including this one) they were grouped by using the term '*aṣabat*, which could rather easily be translated as "gangs." *ṭawa'if*, on the other hand, was a more ambiguous term for this period, burdened by historical connotations that invoked other supposedly dead sodalities, like the famous

[42] On the concept of normalization and elite discourses of nation in the Indian context, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Chatterjee's recent inquiry into the notion of "political society" as a category with greater purchase on third world realities (than, for example, "civil society") augurs the kind of analytics necessary to materialize *al-futuwwa*'s transformation as a historical event and capture something of its everyday-ness. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University, 2004).

[43] It should be kept in mind that the murder of Imtithal Fawzi happened at a time when the bourgeois representatives of the Egyptian nation were engaged in treaty negotiations with the British to eliminate the four clauses of the 1922 declaration that had allowed the former effectively to continue its control over the country. Hence, the desire to appear modern and in self-control was especially pronounced among Egypt's image-makers at a time of heightened uncertainty about the future.

[44] Anonymous, "Adrar al-madaniyya al-haditha: tawa'if al-futuwwat wa-l-baltagiyya," *al-Hisan* 214 (6 June 1936): 4–5.

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artisanal guilds of "Old Cairo."[45] The author clearly signals that he is deploying this term in order to locate the actors who fall within it as part of a different social temporality. Their "specific functions," the author writes, "are carried out in peace and comfort with no fear or dread, as if we were [living] in an age without rulers or laws."[46] For this author, the anachronistic presence of *al-futuwwa* in modernity was a stigma that threatened to pollute all of Egyptian society, to render it "as if" inhabiting a pre-contractarian state of nature. Their elimination, then, is referred to as "the purification [*ṭathir*] of the city."

In this article, the *futuwwa* threat to modern civilization is insistently pinned to their ability to escape the scope of the radar that normally sites temporal anomalies. The prime offenders, labeled *al-futuwwat al-wujaha'*, are distinguished from the others sartorially and physically: "They only wear chic suits and silk shirts, and most of these thugs practice *al-riyaḍa al-badaniyya* [bodybuilding]."[47] However, unlike their athletic counterparts in respectable society, these muscles were used to inspire fear in others and to profit from that fear. This typological description might as well have been cribbed from Fuad al-Shami's biography. Al-Shami was quite the fashion plate and obsessively fastidious about his appearance. In an interview which appeared a few months after this article went to press, al-Shami expressed one of his worst fears about going to prison for life: "I almost go crazy, man, every time I think about the torture that awaits … how will I wear a prison uniform for all those long years? Me, who could never bear to see his suit un-pressed!"[48]

The next class of criminals, *futuwwat lil-ijar*, was also known for sophisticated and chic dress; they differed from the former in that they worked for hire. They were able to evade the "doubt" and "suspicion" of the police because of their appearance and manners. Ostensibly, one would have to be countrified and don the *galabiyya* in order to fit a 1930s profile of a potential suspect. Making their detection even more difficult was that they had penetrated bourgeois society, particularly its younger male circles (*awlad al-zawat*). They are said to have profited greatly from these associations. One of their ruses involved preying on the sense of competition (particularly for lovers) among this class and convincing one that he needed protection from another.

[45] For a recent history that shows the adaptive capacity and continuity of the artisanal trades and other occupations in Cairo, see John Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914* (SUNY Press, 2004).

[46] Anonymous, "Adrar al-madaniyya al-haditha," 4.

[47] Ibid.

[48] *Al-Musawwar* (9 Oct. 1936), 16. Blurring the lines further, this sartorial anxiety could index a whole economy of modern desire, which I explore elsewhere in terms of debates taking place during the same period among the *effendiyya* about proper headdress and national identity. Jacob, *Working Out Egypt*.

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Yet another group that stood out for its ability to pass in bourgeois society was *al-balṭagiyya al-khifafi*. These men married nightclub performers and lived off the earnings of their women: "What is uncanny is that these [individuals] are very sophisticated in their dress. This is because of their desire to appear as wealthy pashas. They are so successful in their parody that even the *awlad al-zawat* [dandies] are unable to rival them. Most of them have mastered [social] etiquette and are able to mix in high society, which regards them, as a result of their guise and their chic clothes, as fabulously wealthy and holders of high positions."[49]

The article ends with a call to the new King Faruq and Prime Minister Nahhas to "purify" the city and to restore security to "us and others like us." Almost as an afterthought, the writer adds the "poor, threatened" fallen girls among the "we." His reluctant inclusion of female entertainers among those who deserve state protection makes clear that what is really at stake is something more fundamental than public safety. Wrapping up his description of the seven criminal types, he notes ironically, "These are the *ṭawa'if al-futuwwat* and *al-balṭagiyya*. This is modern civilization. This is modern progress."[50] The underlying desires here for the reassertion of social and spatial boundaries and the reclamation of modernity index the precariousness of bourgeois-*effendi* identity in and between colonial and national mappings of the city.[51] However, if we bracket the ironic tone announcing this desire, another reading becomes possible, one that allows us to re-vision an entirely different city of multiple life-worlds and temporalities, such that the future horizon—where the *futuwwa* ends and the *effendi* begins—appears blurred rather than self-evident.

That blurring of boundaries between asymmetrical subjects, and concomitantly between their histories, can be pushed even further to arrive at the transformation and transfiguration of *al-futuwwa* in colonial modernity as a historical event. How is this possible? I can only begin to suggest an answer here, one based on the insistence that Fuad al-Shami's claims to inhabit *al-futuwwa* and the searching definitions of it by *effendi* critics do not exhaust this category conceptually. It was perhaps in a similar spirit of inquiry that the eminent Egyptian intellectual Ahmad Amin was inspired to begin studying the ancient roots of this figure within the specific context of the 1930s debates about *al-futuwwa* and anxieties

[49] Anonymous, "Adrar al-madaniyya al-haditha," 5. One wonders in this instance whether "high society" consorted with the passing *al-balṭagiyya* precisely because the passage was visible.

[50] Ibid.

[51] This was the exclusive focus of the larger study, which ultimately produced a blind spot in the place of a history proper to *al-futuwwa*.

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about the location of modernity that were percolating in the aftermath of Imtithal Fawzi's murder.[52]

In 1938, Amin delivered a lecture at the Egyptian Royal Geographical Society based on his initial research.[53] Relying mainly on al-Aghani's biography of Hunayn ibn Ishaq, *ḥamasa* and *mufaḍḍaliyyat* poetry of the Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic) period, Sufi texts, and Ibn Battuta's travelogue, he charted a trajectory for the concept's development from its initial polyvalence within tribal societies to a more fixed field of meaning within the medieval Islamic empires. This coalescence was attributed to the formation of urban fraternities that self-consciously articulated *al-futuwwa* as a code of behavior. Amin seemed to recognize, however, that the seeds of its corruption as an institution were there from the beginning. This was related to the foundation of *al-futuwwa* on simultaneously material/outer and moral/inner bases: "*futuwwa madaniyya*, *dunyawiyya*" and "*futuwwa diniyya*, *ṣufiyya*."[54]

The first, *futuwwa madaniyya*, signified a field of worldly action that privileged the body. Amin assigns it a genealogy that began with the Arab traditions of chivalry and courage that later intersected with Persian and Turkish martial traditions during the 'Abbasid age. The materialization of the *futuwwa* orders as martial bodies was further facilitated by the threat of the Crusades to Islamic civilization.[55]

[52] Ahmad Amin (1 Oct. 1886–30 May 1954) was engaged during his lifetime in a project of making sense of Islamic history in ways that would be relevant to present conditions—hence his designation as a reformer in most accounts of his life. His series of books on the Islamic past—*Fajr al-Islam* (The Dawn of Islam, 1928), *Duha al-Islam* (The Forenoon of Islam, 1933–1936), *Zuhr al-Islam* (The Midday of Islam, 1945–1955), and *Yawm al-Islam* (The Day of Islam, 1952)—became highly popular throughout the Arab world. His career was long and varied. He was educated as a *shari'a* judge and taught ethics at the Shari'a Judges School from which he had graduated in 1911. He worked at times as a translator, editor, and journalist; he also became a lecturer in Arabic Language and Literature at Cairo University (at the behest of Taha Husayn) and served as the Dean of the Arts Faculty in 1939. He participated in Orientalist conferences in Leiden in 1931 and Brussels in 1938. For his autobiography, see Ahmad Amin, *Hayati* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1966); and in English, *My Life*, Issa J. Boullata, trans. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978).

[53] A version of the lecture was published in the May 1942 issue of the *Majalla Kulliyat al-Adab*; then it was expanded and published in book form a decade later: *al-Sa'laka wa-l-futuwwa fi al-islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1952). My analysis is based on the latter. It should also be noted that my reading of this text is by no means exhaustive. It would be interesting to compare Amin's textual "encounter" with *al-futuwwa* and the orientalist ones, which, interestingly, were taking place at the same time.

[54] Amin, *al-Sa'laka wa-l-futuwwa*, 62.

[55] There is a curious piece in *The Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* from 1950 that evaluates and rejects all the previous scholarly attempts to categorize the *futuwwa* organizations as a form of chivalry, arguing that the European practice was essentially different because of its basis in an entirely different social-political order, one "based on a regulated system of land grants ('fiefs')." Gerald Salinger, "Was the Futuwa an Oriental Form of Chivalry?" *The Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94, 5 (19 Oct. 1950): 481–93, 491. Also see Irwin, "Futuwwa."

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In Amin's rendering, the second form, *futuwwa diniyya*, signified a field of normativity and existed in opposition to the *futuwwa madaniyya*. He argues that there were contemporary critics of the latter who based their criticism on etymological grounds, contending that the originary term *fata* was supposed to signify an ethic of kindness and compassion; it did not mean "one who strikes with a sword or knife."[56] The conservative thirteenth-century legal scholar Ibn Taymiyya was said to have objected to the trend toward adopting ritualized practices in the meetings of the *futuwwat* and their distinguishing their appearance.[57] He issued a *fatwa* that dismissed as having no bases in Islam their initiation ritual that required the initiate to drink from a cup of saltwater, and also their decision to require members to wear the *sirwal* (perhaps the first baggy pants!).[58] The poet Ibn al-Wardi condemned the brotherhoods on similar grounds, and added aspersions of moral and sexual deviancy ("*yajma'un laha al-jumu' min al-anbaṭ wa yaḥḍaruha al-murd wa ahl al-liwaṭ*").[59]

Although the links are not made explicit, by delineating contradictory origins for the conceptual framework of *futuwwa* Amin was laying the groundwork for an explanation of why this figure disappeared with the coming of the modern state and society. His analysis of the *futuwwa* tradition seems to proceed from the recognition of a "problem space" that engendered, during the time of his

[56] Amin, ibid., 71–72.

[57] There is a tension here in juxtaposing Ibn Taymiyya's opposition to the *futuwwa* with the particular objections against a worldly *futuwwa* made, most likely, by Sufis. Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya was a Hanbali jurist who lived in Mamluk Damascus from 1263 to 1328 C.E. The trajectory of his opposition to ritual practices emanated from his desire to purify Islam of popular expressions of piety, particularly those authorized by certain forms of Sufism. Furthermore, another problem with invoking Ibn Taymiyya is that the Mamluk rulers saw him as a destabilizing force and jailed him several times until he eventually died a prisoner. This tension can be explained partly as a result of Amin's scant attention to social and political contexts in recovering a history of the *futuwwa*. Clearly there were political reasons for the ruling class of a city to be concerned with the formation of any kind of brotherhood with the potential for independent and forceful action. Amin leaves these other reasons unspoken, but the persistence of this problem in the nature of *futuwwa* sodalities will become apparent in his discussion of their fate in modern times. This is one of the clues that Amin's work is more a history of the present than a project of historical recovery; in other words, his text was deployed as an intervention in contemporary religious and cultural debates. For a theoretical formulation, and example, of writing the historical present and its political significance, see David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*; on writing in the present tense and the role of the "native informant/colonial subject," see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[58] Amin, ibid., 70.

[59] Ibid., 70–71. The attacks on *futuwwa* organizations as breeding grounds for homosexual practices were apparently quite numerous; see Baer, *Egyptian Guilds*, 14, n. 61.

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writing (late 1930s–1940s), the growing obsolescence of a certain kind of human agency.[60] This agency was localized and embodied, and did not exist apart from the relations among individuals; also, it was deeply rooted in an Islamic sociopolitical and ethical history.[61]

Nonetheless, Amin's scholarly gloss on the modern manifestation and transformation of *al-futuwwa* differs from the journalistic representations only slightly. He associates the *futuwwat* with particular neighborhoods in Cairo and Alexandria. "The *futuwwa* is customarily a gallant, noble, and courageous *shab* [young man]; he possesses *muruwwa* and surpasses his peers in all of these characteristics."[62] They existed as a local form of authority that saw its public expression when they headed the processions of wedding or circumcision parties, ostensibly protecting them from possible attack by rival *futuwwa* gangs.[63] Amin identifies their transition from relatively "good" figures to "bad"—slipping into the form of the *balṭagiyya, abu aḥmad* in Alexandria, and *qabaḍaiyya* in Syria—as a product of colonial repression and their own entanglements with drugs and alcohol. After relating an account from al-Jabarti's chronicles of an urban uprising against the French led by the *futuwwat*, [64] Amin posits that the British had learned from the historical experience of the previous occupiers, and thus pursued successfully a policy aimed at eliminating the *futuwwat* through assassinations, imprisonment, and expropriation.[65]

Testing the suppleness of the term *futuwwa* and its power to resist time, Amin suggests that it would be a "more fitting" and a "more beautiful" name to give to the Boy Scouts. Then, in a nostalgic tone, he dismisses the idea saying, "What has passed will not return."[66] He also entertains its applicability to the young men of the Muslim Brotherhood, whom he says distinguish themselves

[60] That Ahmad Amin was definitely concerned about documenting certain traditions before they vanished entirely is made explicit in the introduction to his more popular work *Qamus al-'Adat wa-l-Taqalid wa-l-Ta'bir al-Misriyya* (Dictionary of Egyptian customs, traditions, and expressions), which he started working on at the same time as *al-Sa'laka wa-l-futuwwa*. He writes, "It was seeing customs and expressions, vital and alive in my own time, begin to fade and fall out of use, such that very few were familiar even to my own sons, that compelled me to begin this work." Quoted in Barbara Harlow, "Cairo Curiosities: E. W. Lane's *Account*, and Ahmad Amin's *Dictionary*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, 2 (Apr–June 1985): 281.

[61] Amin suggests heuristically that Western traditions of chivalry and philanthropy—citing the knighthood and Masonic orders—might be shown to have originated from, or at the very least have a relationship to, *al-futuwwa*. Amin, *al-Sa'laka wa-l-futuwwa*, 66, 75, 87–88.

[62] *Muruwwa* connotes a constellation of ideal masculine virtues that when aligned within one individual (usually male) is at the very least highly noticeable: manliness, valor, chivalry, generosity, and sense of honor. Ibid., 89.

[63] Ibid., 90–91. Amin writes that if a rival gang did attack and succeeded in defeating the local protectors, the musical troop accompanying the procession would be required to sing odes in praise of the victors.

[64] Amin thinks that *zu'ar* and *shuṭṭar* were synonyms for *futuwwat*.

[65] Ibid., 93–95.

[66] Ibid., 93.

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from their peers by publicly displaying their possession of *al-futuwwa*, masculinity, and good character.[67] However, Amin argues that although they started with the potential to assume the mantle of the *futuwwa diniyya*, this was obviated by the circumstances that led to their politicization and militarization. He implicitly argues here that by playing on the ground laid out by political parties and states—that is, operating as a worldly institution—the Muslim Brotherhood guaranteed not only their own ultimate irrelevance but, possibly even more tragically for Amin, foreclosed what might have been the last opportunity for the re-inscription of an autochthonous concept of human agency and morality.[68]

In an intriguing conclusion, Amin acknowledges the appropriation of the whole world by a monstrous, organless body. "Modernity has distributed the concepts of *al-futuwwa* and *al-ṣa'alaka* over several unusual (*'ajiba*) institutions."[69] In part, the strangeness of these new institutional bodies seems to lie in the fact that they do not actually possess bodies. Or perhaps it is against their possession of actual bodies that Amin attempts to rehabilitate *al-futuwwa*. Amin argues that through the creation of voluntary and state institutions modernity has harnessed and rationalized modes of delivering aid and assistance to people, as well as the general human impulse to do good. These otherwise bodies—the Boy Scouts, hospitals, schools, universities, public works projects, labor unions, and progressive tax regimes—have rendered *futuwwa* bodies theoretically and practically irrelevant.

CONCLUSION

Upon hearing a commotion outside, a little boy peered from the window of his family's home at 8 Maydan Bayt al-Qadi onto the intersection of Darb Qirmiz and the *maydan*. His home was located in the Gamaliyya neighborhood in the old section of Cairo. It was the spring of 1919, and the newer quarters of Cairo had just seen the first manifestations of nationalist agitation in what would come to be termed "the 1919 Revolution." But the little boy of seven read the scene outside his window as one of the typical processions of *futuwwat* that he was used to seeing in his neighborhood on the occasion of weddings, circumcisions, funerals, or other feasts, celebrations, or anniversaries. Only when he asked his mother who the head *futuwwa* was did he learn that this

[67] There is some evidence that the Watani Party founded by the young nationalist leader Mustafa Kamil and the early twentieth-century secret societies that were associated with the nationalist movement might have self-consciously identified with an ethos of *al-futuwwa*. See, for example, Malak Badrawi, *Political Violence in Egypt 1910–1924: Secret Societies, Plots and Assassinations* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000): 66–68, 179.

[68] Amin, ibid., 96–98. Of course, Amin leaves to God the last word on the future of the Muslim Brotherhood. Much earlier, Amin had written a book about the relationship of an individual's moral character to the nation using the metaphor of the "organic body." Amin, *al-Akhlaq* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1920).

[69] Amin, *al-Sa'alaka wa-l-futuwwa*, 115.

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was a different kind of public procession. Whether his mother was able to explain the difference to him at the time—that it was nationalist, and what made it so—is not clear.

This little boy went on to become one of the most prolific and undeniably the most famous of Arabic fiction writers of the twentieth century. And the character of the *futuwwa*—usually unproblematically translated from his work as thug or gangster—would feature prominently in a number of his most popular works.[70] He was, of course, Naguib Mahfuz.[71] Young Naguib's misrecognition of the demonstration is instructive, and introduces my concluding remarks.

It is evident from the fieldwork conducted in Cairo by Sawsan El-Messiri in the 1970s, and from anecdotal evidence I gathered there during 2000–2002, that *al-futuwwa* remains an ambivalent concept in contemporary Egyptian culture.[72] However, it is routinely translated into English as "thug," "tough," or "gangster" with no qualifying explanation. Although it is impossible today to disentangle *futuwwa* and *balṭagi*, hero and menace—which of course may have been the case for its entire career—the intersection of this figure and the conceptual field underwriting it with modernity and the figure of the *effendi* assured the historical transformation of both figures, but guaranteed history to one alone.

It was to some extent recognition of this historical fate that propelled Amin and Mahfuz to narrate the "vanishing present" of *al-futuwwa* in their different ways—in philology, literature, and interviews.[73] The media investigations of *al-futuwwa*, by contrast, were less concerned with preserving its history than with announcing its death. In the end, even sympathetic accounts had to narrate the death of *al-futuwwa*, because the grounds for other possible conceptions of it, beyond the binary of good and evil, had been reconfigured in colonial modernity. Accordingly, the legibility of *al-futuwwa* as a historical subject was constrained by a liberal discourse of law and order, and its intelligibility was conditioned by the temporality proper to the processes of history—for example, economic incorporation, modernization, urbanization, colonialism, and nationalism.

Naguib Mahfuz's reminiscences of interwar Cairo, for example, might be plumbed for historical details about the social life of *al-futuwwa* and the eclipse of a traditional form of masculinity. However, limiting historical

[70] I analyze elsewhere how this supposedly seamless translation of *futuwwa* precludes more complex readings of this author's texts.

[71] Naguib Mahfuz has expended more intellectual labor on the *futuwwa* than perhaps any of its other interlocutors. Indeed, Mahfuz's brilliant fictionalization and intimate remembrances of this figure inspired my own initial inquiry. See, for example, *Hams al-Junun* (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1969), *Harafish* (Cairo: Maktaba Misr, 1977), and *Awlad Haratina* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1967).

[72] El-Messiri, "The Changing Role of the *Futuwwa*" (1977), and *Ibn al-Balad* (1978).

[73] There is also a very intriguing work by the Egyptian historian Husayn Mu'nis that exhibits a similar concern: *'Asr al-Futuwwat: 'asr al-butula li-l-misriyyin, ayyam al-ihtilal wa-l-wuzara' wa-l-bashawat* (Cairo: Dar Al-Irshad, 1993).

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inquiry to this kind of historicism would reduce the figure to a casualty of colonial modernity and repeat yet again the inaugural violence of the latter.[74] In other words, by folding the history of *al-futuwwa* into the timeline of the modern, its narrative potential is elided as the event is made to serve the narrative requirements of the autobiographies of colonialism and bourgeois nationalism. Mahfuz himself provides the following historical outline for the transformation of *al-futuwwa*:

> When the system of *al-futuwwat* was semi-recognized by the government, the *futuwwa* had to possess certain characteristics like physical strength and courage—because he was engaged in continuous battles—and he had to be sharp in order to win over the people. He also had to exhibit a great deal of gallantry and manliness (*al-shahama wa al-rujula*). After the dissolution of the *futuwwa* system, *al-futuwwa* transformed into '*balṭagi*' who wouldn't hesitate to do anything. Some of them became pimps for underground brothels operating during World War Two . . .. But before, when the *futuwwat* were semi-official, they often played a nationalist role, especially during the days of the 1919 revolution. The greatest resistance the British faced on a popular level was from the *futuwwat*.[75]

I do not wish to question the truth of this account of the *futuwwa*'s history, but rather the ease with which that truth becomes organized in a linear and systemic manner. Here, and also above in young Naguib's misrecognition of nationalism as a repetition of the local *futuwwa* tradition, we might read a foreclosed potential for the re-inscription of modernity in terms of its other. However, by the 1930s the truth of the *futuwwa*'s transformation in modernity was a foregone conclusion to the extent that modernity itself could never be told as the story of *al-futuwwa*.[76]

It should be apparent that in this essay I seek a different "end" to the story of *al-futuwwa* in modern times, and subsequently a different story. At this point in the quest, I can only hint at that other narrative. It is evident, however, that the distinctions through which the *futuwwa* was materialized as an object in the past can only be a partial accounting of this figure. That is not to say that the available distinctions—*futuwwa/effendi*, *futuwwa/balṭagi*, *futuwwa/fitiwwa*—are merely modern constructs, imagined boundaries produced by colonial and nationalist discourses that can simply be deconstructed or un-imagined by the postcolonial critic. Indeed, the sentence beginning "the *futuwwa* is. . ." has announced specific moral, political, legal, and epistemological projects prior to modernity, the possibility of which was a presupposition of alterity. Furthermore, the distinctions through which the *futuwwa* was assigned significance in colonial modernity were not limited to intellectual or political

[74] A critique of historicism along these lines is elaborated in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), particularly in ch. 3, "Translating Life-Worlds into Labor and History."

[75] Raja' al-Naqqash, *Naguib Mahfuz: safahat min mudhakkiratihi wa-adwa' jadida 'ala adabihi wa-hayatihi* (Cairo: Al-Ahram, 1998), 30.

[76] I thank Arang Keshavarzian for helping me see that potential many years ago.

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exercises, but, as El-Messiri's research makes evident, constituted everyday conceptions of this figure.

In colonial modernity, having a history and being in history became indispensable to survival on both the group and individual levels. One's purchase on history could, in fact, serve as a measure of differential well being or human suffering. In that regard, it is of paramount importance to find new ways of writing about groups and individuals whose grip on history is tenuous. It is here that the everyday and the performative can serve as modalities for the exploration of histories that have eluded, or have been erased from, the larger picture. By concentrating on the everyday and the performative as they relate to subjects in formation, the historian's discovery of a fragment, or long reports of observers and officials, becomes less an occasion for celebration and more a moment to reflect critically on the possibility of narrative forms that do not reproduce the exclusive terms of past narrators. The everyday is not merely a new source of historical narratives about the marginalized, nor does the performative simply enable a multiplicity of perspectives to emerge. Rather, these modalities give historians an opportunity to engage their subjects in all of their mediated, recursive, and complex subalternity, at the same time staking out a space in the present for their future rearticulation.

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