Chapter 2 Progress in Technology and *Nahda* in Thought

Most scholars who have studied Arabic literature continue to be fascinated by the cultural phenomenon of the *Nahda*, an era whose meaning can partially be translated as "awakening", "renaissance", or as "enlightenment," a term that denotes its comparability with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. Now it is more widely accepted that the English translation does not quite fully convey *Nahda*'s meaning in Arabic and in the political and social circumstances at the turn of the nineteenth century.[1] Yet, the claim that the *Nahda* is comparable in both its scope and significance with the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement remains unchallenged. This is in no doubt due to the fact that the *Nahda* encompassed vibrant intellectual exchanges of ideas in the Arabic-speaking world, particularly in Egypt and the Levant. Its cultural renaissance was ushered in by a series of Arabic language reforms, literary translation, prosperity in print culture and media, and the adherence to and adaptation of European ideas.[2] In that sense, the *Nahda* carried central intellectual beliefs that resembled the European Enlightenment—rationalism, progress, secularism, and nationalism.

However, it is overly simplistic to depict new ideas merely as products of human intellectual enterprise and furthermore, the *Nahda* as solely a paradigm shift of ideas among Arab intellectuals. Notably, the intellectual output of *Nahda* was not isolated from the rapid political, social, and technological changes of the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Here, the debate whether the *Nahda* was Europe-inspired or Arab self-generated

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[1] Tarek, el-Aris, "Let There Be Nahdah!" *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015): 260-66; Spencer Scoville, "The Agency of the Translator: Khalil Baydas' Literary Translations." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2013, 26-9.

[2] For the *Nahda* literature, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age, 1798-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 2nd Edition); Jens Hanssen, Max Weiss ed., *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

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is less a concern, as material-based and capitalism-driven was already an established norm for many nineteenth-century Egyptians, especially among the upper-middle class. [3] It took the *Nahdawi* intellectuals few efforts to realize that their way of life was fundamentally distinct from their ancestors and from all that they read in historical books. In school, they studied one of the new sciences, biology and read Darwin, who boldly denounced Allah's creation of human beings. [4] This kind of new scientific knowledge became widely circulated in salons, cafes, and various associations or clubs that flourished everywhere in Cairo. For its part, Cairo was undoubtedly a regional and cultural center of the *Nahda*. As people looked at maps, railway lines, like complicated blood vessels, connected the heart of the Khedivate to places appeared only in books.

The upper-class *Nahdawi* intellectuals undoubtedly reaped benefits early on from the new railway transportation—some of them even directly participated in railway management. Earlier and probably more regularly than for other middle- and lower-class Egyptians, trains became an indelible part of the intelligentsia's life experiences and memories. As a result, images of the railway frequently appeared in *Nahdawi* literature—poems, travel literature, autobiographies, and periodicals. Yet the railway's role and significance was fluctuating—it represented a measure of civilizational progress, an embodiment of European imperialism, as well as a source of national identity. This chapter aims to dissect the relationship between the railway as material phenomena and as a representation of core *Nahdawi* tenets, including rationalism, progress, anti-imperialism, and nationalism. The central questions of this chapter are: How did experiences of the *Nahdawi* intellectuals with the railway shape its representations in the *Nahdawi* literature? How did various political and social elements engage with different intellectual interpretations of the railway? How

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[3] I refer to Fernand Braudel's idea of "the material civilization" created by global capitalist expansion. See Fernand Braudel, Patricia Ranum trans., *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

[4] Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013),

did the railway become a crucial factor helped to configure the communal and national identities of *Nahdawi* intellectuals?

This chapter intends to write the material culture of the railway and *Nahdawi* intellectual ideas as a connected and convergent history. To do so, I engage with Material Engagement Theory, a theory that foregrounds the role of things in processes of human cognition.[5] I argue that the railway is more than merely an object comprehended by *Nahdawi* intellectuals, let alone an external representation of *Nahda* ideas. As the railway intervened in their everyday lives and memories, it also became a cognitive extension of the human body. Intellectuals started to conceptualize abstract theory and emphasize certain ideas over others through their lived experiences. From this perspective, the intellectual history of the Egyptian railway is more than a history of ideas—ideas arguably either disseminated from Europe or rejuvenated from the Arabic or Islamic traditions. An integral part of its intellectual history is about material, objects, and technology, as they inspire, carry, and enact intellectual ways of being in the world and of making sense of the world. I do not intend to argue for material agency, as such an overexpansion of agency's conceptualization might inevitably limit its exploratory power. But what I do question is the reduction of human agency to only great minds and ideas. As I will discuss in this chapter, the railway enveloped the minds of *Nahda*wi intellectuals and it shaped their identities.

The Railway as a Measurement of Progress

It is now more widely acknowledged that modern technological development in Western Europe did not inherently carry universal meaning. In order for this technological development to

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[5] Bjørnar Olsen, *In Defense of Things: Archaeology and the Ontology of Objects* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2010). Lambros Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

have universal appeal and acceptance, it required an acknowledgement from the conquered. To gain such recognition from non-European intelligentsia was a challenging proposition due to their oft-unwillingness and belated acceptance of European-developed technology even though these intellectuals were by no means reactionary or conservative in their own societies.[6] As early as 1798, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt shocked Arab intellectuals like 'Abdu al-Rahman al-Jabarti, as he witnessed, heard, and recorded the enormous advantages of modern French firearms against the once-powerful Mamluk cavalry.[7] Meanwhile, as a Muslim intellectual, he was utterly confident in Islamic knowledge. In the eyes of al-Jabarti, and of many other Muslim intellectuals at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the French campaign only succeeded militarily, with their superior rifles and longer-ranged cannons. For al-Jabarti, it became apparent that Muslims, if they acquired the same advanced technology, would unquestionably overcome the European threats with their piety and beliefs.[8] Muslims' confidence in their religion, their culture, and their way of life seemed supported by the immediate demise of the French occupation. With his campaign muddled, Napoleon Bonaparte toiled in Egypt for three more years and permanently abandoned his one-time ambition of ruling the Muslim territory.

For the first half of the nineteenth century, military threats from Europe were relatively remote and inconceivable. It was during this period of political stability and economic prosperity

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[6] Pierre Bourdieu extensively discussed the idea of inertia. He maintains that people develop a set of behaviors, lifestyles, and habits that often preserve their status quo. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups," in *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6 (1985): 723-44.

[7] Shmuel Moreh, *The Egyptian Historian 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī: His Life, Works, Autographs, Manuscripts and the Historical Sources of 'Ajā'ib al-Athār* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 176. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *Ajā'ib al-Athār*,

[8] Napoleon proclaimed himself as a Muslim and that he expelled the Knights of Malta in order to win the support of Egyptian Muslims. But obviously al-Jabartī and other Muslim intellectuals at that time had no motif to believe what Napoleon proclaimed. See Shmuel Moreh, *The Egyptian Historian*, 207; Juan Cole, *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30. For the confidence of al-Jabartī's Muslim identity, see 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *Tārīkh Muddat al-Faransīs bi-Miṣr*. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *Maẓhar al-taqdīs bi-zawāl dawlat al-Faransīs* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣrīya, 1998), 303-304.

that European technologies began to appeal to the Arabic-speaking intelligentsia. They travelled and studied in Europe, expressing their full admiration of the emerging modernity outside the Muslim world. Meanwhile, they eagerly learned advanced technology from Europeans with the increasingly clear goal of self-development.[9] While Muhammad Ali undertook his ambitious plan of modernizing Egypt, he sent numerous young students to Europe, including Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi and Ali Mubarak.[10] Globalization, at least on an intellectual level, was in motion. As al-Tahtawi observed, there was no way to hold back globalization, as the invention of steam engines, the telegraph, the excavation of the Suez Canal, and the layout of railway tracks had already created a more connected world that he himself was a part of.[11] The perceived inevitability of globalization driven by technology, or Westernization to a larger extent, inspired the generation of the *Nahda*, who opened their eyes wide and embraced new changes.

The train, for the first Arab generation who witnessed the machine, was an unimaginable, colossal, and powerful creation, one that evoked sensationalism. Such exhilaration and bewilderedness can best be found in al-Tahtawi's eulogy for the steam engine. Al-Tahtawi used this poem to conclude the first chapter of *Manāhij al-Albāb al-Miṣrīyya* after he had described the railway in the United States:

"[The train's engine] is like the arising of volcano's fire, bursting all of a sudden.

Or like a traveler aspiring for its trip, witnessing all the world's beauty.

Or like a lover was denied of his proposal, even his envy towards his rival.

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[9] Jamal Mohammed Ahmed. *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), [page no.].

[10] For Muhammad Ali's modernization projects in Egypt and its influence on the Egyptian intellectual, see Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), [page no.]; P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt: From Muhammad Ali to Mubarak* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991),

[11] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *al-Amal al-Kamila*, vol.1, 338-9.

Love creates restraint, and tears that converge into a pond."[12]

The eulogy was much more than an expression of al-Tahtawi's personal feelings. As a cultural observer, he was fully awarene of the railway's significant political and social power. In a later poem, he penned an analogy where the train was a fixed star in the sky, situated between the sun—the political center—and the other planets were human beings, citizens orbiting around its center. In other words, the railway bestowed political power to the people while exemplifying its grandeur. This worldview maintained existing social hierarchies, while necessarily devaluing other railway-less societies. Using poetic sentiment, al-Tahtawi conveyed to his readers the sense of competition and progress that was related to technology. It was urgent for rulers as well as his readers to appreciate the railway's potential, so that his country and fellow citizens would not fall behind.

"[The train] is Mercury without comparison, as if it is a fixed star.

The sun obtained from [the train] its yellowness, upon the whistle's sound, it rose up.

It is like the moon that bestows authority to a knowledgeable man, and Arcturus which has its night discourser.

In its palm, there is Gemini worn as a bracelet, it will make Pleiades beautiful and then others will fall down."[13]

Besides praising the power of trains, al-Tahtawi also wrote the eulogy for the Egyptian Khedive, Ismail, who during his reign (r. 1863-1879), had supported and invested in an enormous number of railway projects throughout the Nile Valley.[14] Notably, Al-Tahtawi probably never traveled by European train himself. When he traveled and studied in France in , this era preceded

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[12] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Manāhij al-albāb al-Miṣrīyya* (Cairo: 1912), 126-8.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Osama Ettouney, *Railways Along the Nile and the Renaissance of Modern Egypt, 1897-1879* (SC, North Charleston, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 28-35.

the country's rapid railway development. Yet he was a contemporary witness of the railway boom in Egypt since 1853. He personally experienced and witnesses the transition of the railway from a purely exotic and upper-class experiment to a common means of mass transportation that benefited thousands of travelers.[15] Such a widespread and all-encompassing transition greatly fascinated al-Tahtawi, not only due to the sheer mechanical marvel of the railway projects but also what a comprehensive railway system could potentially mean for Egypt. The latter, what al-Tahtawi meant by the social benefits (*al-manāfiʿ al-ʿumūmīya*), which he discusses at length in the second chapter *Manāhij*, immediately following the poem.[16] Specifically, the railway "removed the beasts, and made people informed of what they had not seen, and reached place they had never reached before. There is no barrier in reaching any land, so this era is aptly called the era of civilization (*ʿaṣr al-madanīya*)."[17]

In al-Tahtawi's knowledge system, he classified two categories of distinct yet interconnected knowledge: practical science (*al-ʿulum al-hikmīya*) and religious science (*al-ʿulum al-sharʿīya*).[18] Among the most crucial goals of *Manāhij*, as well as of al-Tahtawi's intellectual life, was to revive and promote the forgotten practical sciences and weighed it equally with Islamic-based science. Massive government spending on the railway and other infrastructure projects during the period of Khedive Ismail's rule seemed to meet al-Tahtawi's expectations. In fact, it had already exceeded his expectations with Egypt pushing toward a new direction of civilization, one that was equally balanced between the practical and religious sciences. Such infrastructure developments made up for Egypt's deficiencies in the practical sciences that had lasted for a century, and helped to qualify it to become a civilized nation (*ahl al-ʾadab wal-ẓarāfa*

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[15] Al-Ṭahṭāwī, *Manāhij*, 126.
[16] Al-Ṭahṭāwī, *Manāhij*, 129.
[17] Al-Ṭahṭāwī, *Manāhij*, 126.
[18] Rifāʿah Rāfiʿ Ṭahṭāwī, *Kitāb al-murshid al-amīn lil-banāt wa-al-banīn* (Cairo: 1872), 806-807.

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wal-taḥaḍḍur wal-tamaddun wal-tamaṣṣur), one that matched European industrial nations and distinguished one from the savage nations (*mutawaḥḥishīn*) and the barbaric nations (*barābira*).[19] In other words, the railway realized al- Tahtawi's dream for Egypt's elevation within a strict global hierarchy. This hierarchical topography of civilizations and the idea of progress was not necessarily a mimicry of European style of civilization mission. But the reasons for substantiating al-Tahtawi's typology could be located in his the real world experiences.

Born twenty years after al-Tahtawi, Ali Mubarak continued al-Tahtawi's commentary and thoughts on civilizational progress. Embarking on a journey to France in 1844, at a time when rail travel was prevalent, the young Mubarak could not quiet both his horror and delight with his first glimpse of the iron horse. In Mubarak's travel literature *'Alam ad-Dīn*, speaking through his protagonist, he tells his audience about his own experiences with first-time train travel:

"['Alam ad-Din and his son] sat in one of the first-class cabins. They watched the train's motion. When its movement intensified and its speed increased, the sheikh's ('Alam ad-Din) heart started beating (*iḍṭarab*) many times. A feeling of fear (*ḥawf*) arose. He had never been so afraid in his life. When the train proceeded, he heard shrieks and screams behind him, his companion travelers vocal in their amazement and fear as well."[20]

Parallel to what al-Tahtawi described in the poem, passers-by showed their amazement in front of the iron machine, the embodiment of a new progressive force as of yet unknown to the East. The literature genre of Mubarak allowed him to convey the sentiments in more detail. 'Alam ad-Din's intensive heartbeat, sudden fear, and auditory hallucination derived not only from the motion of train, but also his inexperience in railway travel—it was his first time seeing and traveling by train. These feelings were purely a physiological response to the colossal machine and

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[19] Rifā'ah Rāfi' Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Waṣf Bārīz*, 6-7.
[20] Ali Mubarak, *'Alam ad-Dīn*, vol. 1, 88.

of its attendant European modernity, and they were also irrational. Mubarak continued to indicate that these irrational feelings could be eradicated by people's willingness to adjust themselves to the train. After ad-Din was assured that his reactions were natural, he "still felt awestruck, but his heart stilled, and he sat calmly, depending on the creator of humankind (*khālig al-warā*)."[21] He called what he had just experienced a "sign of faith" (*'alāmat al-'imān*). So ad-Din's first face-to-face experience with the train demonstrated his transition from human irrationality to religious belief. In other words, this life-altering experience reaffirmed his belief in God's rationality against human insanity.

Mubarak did not cease at the first phase that illustrated the train as the sign of faith, or the God's embodiment on earth. He continued to discuss the second phase of transition, the transition from religion to society. During ad-Din's train travel, his companion, an English lord, often functioned as the mouthpiece of industrial progress and explained the various aspects of the railway to the sheikh. In their dialogue, ad-Din realized that the train was much more than a sophisticated machine, that it was also a harbinger of inexhaustible benefits and advancement. Towards the end of his train trip, ad-Din shared his fresh experience and knowledge to his fellow countrymen:

"The sheikh ('Alam ad-Din) said it was true that the railway's benefits were plenty, not only limited to trade, but also to other societal aspects, including industry, agriculture, science, arts, people's customs and norms, morality, politics, and even prosperity and civilization…If he shared [the railway's benefits] with his countrymen, they would benefit greatly…People in rural areas could use the railway for transporting agricultural products, and urban dwellers could collect their garbage and dispose of it elsewhere."[22]

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[21] Ali Mubarak, *'Alam ad-Dīn*, vol. 1, 88.
[22] Ali Mubarak, *'Alam ad-Dīn*, vol. 1, 128-9.

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'Alam ad-Din's travel experience told audiences a much larger story than an individual encounter with modern technology. Its narrative arc exposed the personal growth of a character from being preoccupied by irrational emotions to one embracing a rational existence. Additionally, it was also about his transformation from a religious self to a social being. Much more than Mubarak's alter ego, 'Alam ad-Din was a role model for his audiences, even acting like a microcosm of Egypt as a whole, which could rationally analyze the railway's social benefits and adopt to its progress.

With the political clout he accrued during the reign of Khedive Ismail, Ali Mubarak eventually was able to enact what he envisioned as the railway's benefits. After completing his engineering studies in France, Mubarak's talent and technological expertise soon impressed the ever-ambitious ruler. He eventually became the chief engineer of Ismail's magnificent modernization projects and became the Minister of Public Works in 1867, responsible for Cairo's reconstruction. A year later, Mubarak incorporated the railway system under his ministry by serving as the director of the Egyptian State Railway (ESR). In his six-year service at the ESR, he made far-reaching contributions to Egypt's railway development.[23] As Michael Reimer argues "the progress [Mubarak] had in mind is essentially technocratic, uncomplicated by an awareness of the unforeseen and disparate effects of state-sponsored reforms."[24] In Mubarak's mind, the railway was the ultimate engine for such progress. Therefore, he should be the conductor so that he could direct Egypt's march toward civilization.

Not only did individual Arab travelers to the West bring Egypt new knowledge on the latest technological developments. The Ottoman Empire's cultural coherence and influence outlasted its

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[23] Barak, *On Time*, 60-61.
[24] Michael J. Reimer, "Contradiction and Consciousness in Ali Mubarak's Description of al-Azhar," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (1997): 57.

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political dominance in Egypt. The ever-developing urban centers in Egypt attracted Ottoman scholars of various religious backgrounds to reside and create new cultural prosperity during this period of nation-building. Among the intellectuals who migrated to Egypt, the Syrian Christian intelligentsia established themselves as the curators of the West. Instead of pro-British media outlets, magazines and newspapers written, edited, and published by the Syrian Christian community spoke in a language more amenable and approachable to the bourgeoning Egyptian middle-class's sensibility and aspirations *effendiyya*. Since their faith differed from the Egyptian Muslim majority, they also carefully chose and calibrated their tenor, marking themselves as avant-garde in secular thought while at the same time, distancing themselves from any potential communal strife.

Science and technology became the most popular topics in the Syrian-created magazines. On the one hand, many of the Syrian editors themselves were amateur scientists or technology enthusiasts. Faris Nimr and Yaqub Sarruf, two editors of *al-Muqtaṭaf*, the first and most well-known Arabic magazine of popular science, majored in astronomy and mathematics at Syrian Protestant College, which was later renamed the American University of Beirut. Prior to emigrating to Egypt, they were embroiled in a fierce controversy over Darwinism at university before they extended a similar debate to Egypt.[25] The Syrian immigrants, by any means, were by far more exposed to and experienced in Western science and technology. Their position as translators and interlocutors of the West remained unchanged for almost a half century.

On the other hand, the Syrian editors were fully aware of how to best position and adjust scientific knowledge to political and social conditions in Egypt. In the wake of 'Urabi's fiasco, Syrian migrants, similar to their Muslim counterparts, felt deeply anxious about their country's

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[25] Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin*, 27.

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future. Among them there was Jurgi Zaydan, an ardent believer of social Darwinism, a freemason maverick, and an Orthodox Christian who held a professorship in Islamic history.[26] Adding to this already idiosyncratic belief system, Zaydan was an early theorist and supporter of Arab nationalism while openly criticizing the anti-British activisms of Ahmed 'Urabi and Mustafa Kamal. Instead, he believed in self-determination and was a staunch supporter of education that taught individuals about universal ideas and self-improvement. For Zaydan, the Arab nation would not gain true independence unless its people were well-informed and, were thus fully capable of defending themselves against imperial encroachment.[27] Due to such, he devoted himself to writing and publishing, as a means of enlightening the public and instilling a sense of activism. Zaydan began his career as the assistant editor at al-Muqtaṭaf, and was responsible for writing scholarly articles on various historical topics. In 1892, he founded his most influential project, the monthly magazine al-Hilāl. Besides its publication of serialized historical novels and literary reviews, al-Hilāl paid special attention to Western technological innovations and their potential consequences for Arab audiences.

Like many of their contemporaries, the Syrian immigrants envisioned a world rife with competing civilizational progress. Scientific and technological achievements, conjoined with religion and culture, worked as qualitative indicator to assess human worth, and at times, as proof of human inequality. Michael Adas has demonstrated from a Western genealogy how technology helped shape European views about non-European people.[28] Nineteenth-century Arab intellectuals, particularly with their secular outlook, readily accepted the modern premises of technology's

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[26] Thomas Phlipp, *Gurgi Zaidan His Life and Thought* (Beirut, 1979). Dorothe Sommer, *Freemasonry in the Ottoman Empire: A History of the Fraternity and its Influence in Syria and the Levant* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).
[27] Thomas Philipp, "Language, History, and Arab National Consciousness in the Thought of Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1 (1973): 3-22.
[28] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015) [page no.]

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measuring power. They positioned themselves as cultural interlocutors and translators of esoteric terms and fashionable theories. By doing so, they hoped to educate the public of how paramount science and technology was to individual improvement and national development.

The railway, in this blueprint, was not only imagined as the engine of economic prosperity and efficient governance, but also as the measure of national or civilizational progress. In *al-Hilāl*'s comments on the belatedness of railway construction in China, the editor noted, "many Chinese refuse to emulate modern civilization (*al-tamaddun al-hadīth*), as people elsewhere do. However, they seemed to have returned to their senses (*rajaʿu ilā al-sawāb*) and have decided to build a 1,400 mile long railway."[29] Likewise, *Al-Muqtaṭaf* expressed a similar viewpoint. The "growth of Egypt" (*taqaddum al-bilād*) was best crystallized in its technological progress, in the railway and other departments.[30]

[29] "Railway in China," *al-Hilāl*, vol. 5, 1896, 38.
[30] "Railway in Egypt," *al-Muqtaṭaf*, vol. 19, 1895, 473.

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Figure 1 *A Table of Railway Length Rankings by Nation in al-Muqtaṭaf.*[31]

To equate the railway with progress, these two magazines transformed railway's importance into concrete parameters that were easily quantified, compared, and ranked. Among various categories, the length of rail lines reflected its geographical coverage and connectivity within a designated sphere. The speed of the railway indicated its efficiency in covering territory. So, of note, length and speed became two of the most common measuring parameters. *Al-Muqtaṭaf*, for instance, periodically published ranking lists of the longest railway networks, ranked from the longest to the shortest, and based on each continent or country. Europe, in the late nineteenth century, was undoubtedly the most railed continent, followed by America, Asia, and Africa.[32]

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[31] "Railway in the World," *al-Muqtaṭaf*, vol. 31, 1906, 267.
[32] "Railways in the World," *al-Muqtaṭaf*, vol. 8, 1883, 125.

When ranked by country, the US possessed by far the longest tracks worldwide at this time.[33] Typically , a rail line's speed was not included on this kind of list. But it was still an important comparison . A new locomotive that broke speed records would appear in the magazines, compared to the fastest train speeds in each country.[34]

Besides length of rail lines and train speed, journalists also attached great importance to the railway's economic value. As Muslim counterparts, they believed that the railway represented and symbolized prosperity. *Al-Muqtaṭaf* noted in 1895, "The total value of world's railways is between five and six billion pounds. That equals to ten times the amount of the annual revenues of European countries and America. The total value of gold and silver in the world does not exceed to several million pounds."[35] Following the logic of capitalist accumulation, financial investment in the railway yielded profits and increased its value. As such, journalists not only viewed the railway as an object that was in and of itself valuable, but also as an industry that increased national wealth. According to statistics published in *al-Muqtaṭaf*, England in 1897 made a profit of one hundred million pounds each year from the railway, amounting to nearly twenty percent of its total assets.[36] Whereas America witnessed the highest increase of profits, which by 1890 reached eighteen million pounds, four times higher than compared to twenty years earlier.[37] At the same time that the Egyptian State Railway was climbing out of its previous colossal debts, the profitability of Western railway systems, in the eyes of these journalists, seemed to mark the consequential gap between the Western powers and Middle Eastern governments.

[33] "Railways in America," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 13, 1889, 351; "Railways in the World," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 31 1906, 267.
[34] "The Fastest Train in the World," *Al-Hilāl*, vol.3, 1895, 747
[35] "The Value of Railways," *al-Muqtaṭaf*., vol. 13, 1888, 348.
[36] "Railways in England," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 25, 1900, 285.
[37] "Railways in America," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 38, 1911, 516.

Travel safety was the third component of the railway that the journalists analyzed and emphasized. *Al-Muqtaṭaf* did not believe that the railway was by nature "dangerous" to travelers. It was only presented as "dangerous" because deaths caused by train accidents were both unnatural and brutal.[38] The editors astutely observed that technological flaws were not the main cause of rail accidents. More accidents happened because of excessive speed, ill-preparation of railway signals, and carelessness or tiredness of train conductors.[39] Similarly to previous parameters, the journalists also quantified the risk by calculating the number of rail accidents in Egypt and provided comparisons among countries. In this aspect, railways in Western Europe generally had a smaller number of accidents than its American counterpart, even though the latter demonstrated faster speeds and higher profitability.[40] By identifying risk and putting it into a national-comparative framework, *Al-Muqtataf*'s journalists warned their readership about the importance of proper railway management in railway and the necessity to define the railway's from multiple perspectives in addition to railway length, speed, and profitability.

Although *Al-Muqtataf* extolled the objective and quantitative virtues of the railway, human perceptions of the railway were never entirely objective. Although every passenger had his or her own personal experience, the railway on its macro level was in fact a blind zone of knowledge for nonexperts. It was more likely for common travelers to hear or tell anecdotal stories about the railway; yet the real difficulty was in evaluating the entire national railway system, let alone the transnational system. This inability to perceive of and understand the overall railway system was also what journalists were concerned about. Instead of storytelling or merely providing philosophical reasoning, the Syrian journalists chose to use concrete numbers to provide a more

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[38] "Danger of Railway," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 26, 1901, 567.
[39] "Railway Accidents and Solution," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 39, 1911, 166-168.
[40] "Railways in America," *al-Muqtataf*, vol. 25, 1900, 278.

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comprehensive overview of the global scope of railway development. This was a novel invention, utterly beyond the Islamic literary tradition, which coetaneous Muslim intellectuals like al-Tahtawi and Mubarak were cultivating. By favoring numbers over narratives, rankings over rhetoric, these journalists also created a sense of objectivity and formality among their readership.[41] Instead of Islamic piety as a source of credibility, a belief by which Muslim intellectuals held numerical reasoning provided an equally convincing alternative for Egypt's religious minorities.

Although Muslim and Christian intellectuals of the late nineteenth century approached the railway through various literary genres—poetry, travel literature, and popular science magazines, all their work contributed to the creation of a civilizational order and progress in which technology also played as an inseparable and parallel role, Muslim intellectuals like Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi and Ali Mubarak, comprehended the transformative power of the railway for nation-building. In their articles, the celebrated the advances made by railway, informing their readers of its significance and helped Egypt to gain the upper hand in an increasingly fierce civilizational competition. Additionally, the Syrian journalists, in tandem, developed and published numerical representations to delineate a more objective, yet equally hierarchical structure of civilizational progress. From these journalistic of individual passengers experiencing railway travel, to the social benefits of the railway, to the quantitative accounting of the railway's contributions to the nation, the material world constantly shaped the mind of Arabic-speaking intellectuals, and furthermore, the minds and sensibilities of their faithful audiences.

The Railway in Danger

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[41] For numbers as a source of credibility, see Theodore Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

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Fantasies of European technological advances were soon replaced by imminent threats of New Imperialism. As unprecedented pursuit of overseas territorial acquisition occurred in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the Muslim world soon became cognizant of its own precariousness. Despite the fact that Colonel 'Urabi was much more prepared for any impending foreign invasion than his Mamluk predecessors, he was likewise no match for the European aggressors. On the one hand, eighty years of technology transfer had helped Egypt resemble Europe in many ways. But with the political changes of the late 1870s, modern technological spectacles—the railways, the telegraph, and the Suez Canal in particular—all suddenly fell into the hands of Europeans. In such an acute crisis, the benefit of technological modernity needed an urgent redefinition among the *Nahdawi* intellectuals.

European territorial acquisition in Africa was accompanied by pronounced and clarion-sounding colonial discourses that marginalized and often humiliated local cultures. Reflective of this discourse, in 1883, French philologist Ernest Kenan delivered a famous lecture at the Sorbonne, entitled "Islam and Science," in which Kenan asserted that for centuries Islam inhibited the development of modern science and technology.[42] According to Kenan, the preponderance of medieval science and technology in the Muslim world was Greek in origin, origins which he alleged owed nothing to Islam. He blamed al-Ghazāli (d.1111) who favored a mystical life instead to that of one grounded in philosophical rationalism. After the death of 'Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), the last Muslim philosopher discussed in Kenan's work, Islam and science officially fell apart.[43] Since then, Muslims, shackled by their religion, were unable to think rationally nor produce any

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[42] Jamal al-Din al-Afghānī, "Answer to Renan," in Nikki R. Keddie trans. and ed., *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writing of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 183. Afghānī published the French original on May 18, 1883 in the *Journal des Débats*. See A. M, Coichon trans., "Résponse de Jamal ad-Din al-Afghania Renan," *Réfutation des materialists* (Paris, 1942), 176-7.
[43] Renan, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*.

meaningful scientific discoveries. Kenan's theory, despite its deep-seated controversies, established the core of Western beliefs about, and representations of Islam for nearly a century, and its remnants still find attentive audiences today.[44]

Kenan's speech agitated many Muslim intellectuals and forced them to reconsider their own situation and place under the emerging claws of New Imperialism.[45] The Muslim world was stuck in a mire of weakness and helplessness. Among the former Ottoman *eyalets* (replaced by *vilayets* in 1867), Algeria was the first to fall in 1830. The French occupation of Tunisia in 1881 initiated a new round of colonization. Great Britain immediately followed suit, severely bombarding the Port of Alexandria and sending troops to occupy the city. Cairo, the city that at one time had challenged Istanbul to be the cultural center of the Muslim world, succumbed to its new foreign rulers and their formidable army. Kenan's speech, delivered within the historical context of the scramble for Africa, provided a strong case and endorsement of European racial superiority, thus warning Muslim intellectuals of its dangerous proposition and their ever precarious situation.

Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), the torchbearer of the *Nahda* movement, responded to Kenan's assertion of an essentially unscientific Islam and European exceptionalism.[46] He argued that religion played distinct roles at different stages of historical development. For al-Afghani, religion could either booster scientific progress or stifle it. In its heyday, the Islamic world had been the center of science and philosophy and Muslim intellectuals had fully excavated

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[44] For instance, Bernard Lewis is still one of the most influential scholars of the Middle East and Islamic Studies, whose works continues to disparage Islam as unmodern in nature and against modern science and technology. See Bernard Lewis, Islam and the West (Oxford University Press, 1994, Reprinted Edition), [page no.] For other works, see Dan Diner, *Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World Stood Still* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[45] For the development of New Imperialism in the African continent, see Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain. *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Routledge, 2010, 3rd edition).

[46] Al-Afghānī, "Answer to Renan."

and embraced the rational dimension of Islam to support their scientific thinking. However, he conceded that during recent decades, Islam declined in its commitment to reason, whereas Christianity had reformed itself and rightfully promoted scientific progress. "If it is true that the Muslim religion is an obstacle to the development of sciences, can one affirm that this obstacle will not disappear someday?...The Christian religion has emerged from the first period to which I have just alluded; henceforth free and independent, it seems to advance rapidly on the road of progress and science, whereas Muslims have yet to free themselves from the tutelage of religion."[47] Instead of Kenan's static denouncement of Islam, al-Afghani tended to view all religions in the perpetual process of self-improvement and self-justification. Due to such, he urged other Muslim intellectuals to distinguish between the harmful and the beneficial elements of Islam and in doing so, to use these elements strategically as guides for national progress.[48]

The road of Islamic reform was long; but the menace of European imperialism was approaching day by day. Although some Arab intellectuals still maintained that infrastructure projects would eventually benefit their own civilizational progress, an increasingly number of them shifted to view these state-building projects as signs of imperialist global expansion and as punishment for the rapid loss of sovereignty in non-Western countries. Nascent pro-nationalism sentiment was growing, although the fluidity of national identities still comprised an imminent problem in the formation of a full-fledged and obtainable nationalist agenda. Yet this was the first step in defining a perceived danger and its origin.

Imperial control over and management of non-European railway lines drew the acute attention of nationalist thinkers, as they increasingly viewed competition over national interests as a zero-sum game. In this logic, the railway, if financed, built, and owned by foreign entities, would

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[47] Al-Afghānī, "Answer to Renan."
[48] Al-Afghānī, "Answer to Renan."

exclusively serve imperial interests at the cost of local government and people. As such, the railway was no longer understood as a neutral promoter of global trade and economy. The railway's enterprise was now suspect and compromised, tagged with ownership, with property rights, and with non-shareable privileges, which justified the emergence of global imperialism and the poverty of colonized populations. As al-Afghani precisely pointed out in his observation of British infrastructure projects in India:

"The victorious British Government speaks to the Indian people: I will build the cities (Mumbai, Kolkata, Karachi) for you, and their models…… I will also pave telegraph lines and establish railways, dig canals and build bridges…… You, however, only showed disagreement and hypocrisy, abandoned obedience and broke the tranquility. The Indians answered the British with grievances: you only establish those cities after you destroyed our countries which was originally embellished and flourished……you pave the telegraph lines, establish railways, dig canals and build bridges only for bleeding our wealth while facilitating trades of British inhabitants and expand their wealth. We become impoverished and our wealth has depleted, and thus many of us die of starvation!"[49]

Al-Afghani was far ahead of his time when Immanuel Wallerstein developed his Marxist world-sytem theory.[50] Both scholars perceived the widening structural gap between the economic core and the economic periphery and their converse interconnectedness, arguing that the nature of this interconnectedness was the pivotal reason for the gap. Al-Afghani, in particular, voiced grave concern about the role of European infrastructure projects in exploiting colonial resources.[51] He

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[49] Jamal Din al-Afghānī, "al-Ellat al-haqiqīya le-sa adat al-insān," *al-Manār*, vol. 23, Jan. 1922.
[50] Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
[51] In terms of Wallerstein's views on transportation infrastructure in the world systems, he sees it as "the basic underpinnings of a system of production and trade." But he also notes that the high cost of infrastructures requires intervention of the state. So, Wallerstein mostly views infrastructure as the cost for the center to maintain its hegemony. In this respect, al-Afghani's critique of global capitalism was even harsher than Wallerstein's. See Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*, 48-49, 82-83, 95.

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questioned the seemingly benevolence of these projects and exposed that these projects structurally reinforced the poverty of the colonies by placing them under the control of their colonizers. As such, Al-Afghani completely negated the emancipatory capacity of colonial infrastructure, viewing it as pure illusion and cultural whitewashing, a disingenuous and dangerous discourse that perpetuated European domination throughout the world.

Al-Afghani represented a new trend of reevaluating the railway not as a universal measure of progress, but quite to the contrary, as its inhibitor. At the turn of the twentieth century, this emergent and merited concern about the railway began to prevail among Arab intellectuals and ascribed the discursive foundation of the railway's nationalization in post-World War I Egypt. Not only did Muslim intellectuals express such concerns, but also Christians whose status within Egyptian nationalism was more intricate, and in some regards, precarious. Yaqub Sarruf and Faris Nimr, two core figures from the Syrian circle mentioned earlier in this chapter, expressed their deep worry about foreign control of the railway, regarding this control as a colonial trap that disguised itself as universal progressiveness:

"This is 960,000 pounds that the Ottoman government needs to pay to foreign companies every year [for railway], and all this money is extracted from the blood of its subjects. This amount is an interest of a total debt of twenty million pounds for one hundred years to the foreign companies. The Ottoman government would have become rich if it had invested the money in its subjects or with improving its politics. Some relatively poor countries, like Switzerland, can build the railway by its own finances. Japan is also able to establish 3,635 meters of railways with its own finances and does not need to borrow a penny from foreigners. The old country (Ottoman Empire) should have built [railways] to further develop itself, thus avoiding making itself trapped

and controlled [by foreign companies]. It should also forbid any trick, bribery, or prerequisite to acquire the privilege [of lending money to the Ottoman government].”[52]

The Ottoman railway system operated quite differently than the Egyptian State Railway. Yet there was one commonality that drew the editors’ attention—public debt. Similar to Egypt’s historical processes, the Ottoman foreign debts accumulated from large infrastructural projects, especially the railway, eventually forcing the Sublime Port to concede a part of its financial sovereignty to establish a European-dominated Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Düyun-u Umumiye-i Osmaniye Varidat-ı Muhassasa İdaresi*) in 1881.[53] Although the *Al-Muqtaṭaf* authors did not mention Egypt directly—they most likely felt politically insecure to do so at the time of British colonization, the Ottoman example implicated a comparable financial crisis as the one in Egypt, a crisis that made the Abdeen Palace lose the entirely of its country’s finances to the *Caisse de la Dette Publique* in 1876, and even more detrimentally endangered the Egypt’s political sovereignty only six years later.

Additionally by the late nineteenth century, there was a nationalist consensus on a citizen-based creation of infrastructure. This discursive framework initiated by Ali Mubarak’s reforms curbed the Egyptian Khedive’s unlimited usage rights of the railway.[54] Although British occupiers interrupted Mubarak’s projects, the growing consciousness was one that viewed the railway not as a private asset but rather one of public interest had already taken root in the minds of many Egyptians. Although this point of view was prior to the birth of the modern welfare state, the concept of social infrastructures that would serve as public welfare gained popular support and approval. This new consciousness was best expressed by ‘Urabi’s revolutionary slogan of “Egypt

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[52] “Railways in Turkey,” *al-Muqtaṭaf*. vol.27, 1902, 996-1000.
[53] Yaqub Nasif Karkar, “Railway Development in the Ottoman Empire: 1856-1914, An Economic Interpretation,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 86-91.
[54] On Barak, *On Time*, 74-75.

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for the Egyptians" (*Miṣr lil-Miṣriyyin*). In fact, Egyptian nationalism invented the idea of "the people" in an era when the British controlled the government superstructure. With this slogan, nationalism expressly tilted in a populist direction.[55] Within this growing a populist framework, the railway became a center of contention. As both al-Afghani and *al-Muqtaṭaf* noted in the Indian and Ottoman contexts, the failure of colonial infrastructures manifested not only in the decrease of national revenue, but also in their inability and negligence in social welfare for their citizens.

Perhaps nobody other than Abdullah Al-Nadim could better represent the voices of anticolonial nationalism in the wake of 'Urabi's Revolution. Al-Nadim, a provocative journalist, a fervent Egyptian nationalist, and best known among Egyptian intellectuals as "the orator of the 'Urabi Revolution'" (*Khāṭib al-Thawra*), had previously worked as an ERA telegraph operator in 1863. At that time, he was far from a public intellectual. Quite to the contrary, as a well-educated and confident young man with good prospects, al-Nadim detested the the populace, the working class, and their substandard living conditions visible near railway stations, as well as his work colleagues. He considered such conditions unfavorable to his long-term intellectual development. In a letter to one of his friends, he wrote: "I have written [this letter] after my hours of duty, amidst the warning signals of the engines and the rumbling of the trains, surrounded by ruffians, drunkards, and hashish addicts, groups playing dominoes and others reading *Kalīla wa Dimna*. Some others play cards, and one jumps like a monkey."[56] The young al-Nadim, a self-centered and rather privileged young man, showed little sympathy towards the poor living conditions of his railway colleagues.

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[55] Ziad Fahmy has emphasized on the popular front created by the 'Urabi Revolt. See Ziad Fahmy, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Modern Nation Through Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 53-57.

[56] 'Abdallāh al-Nadīm, *Sulāfat al-Nadīm fī Muntakhabat* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Hindāya, 1914, 2nd edition), vol. 1, 49.

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Yet, a mere fifteen years later, al-Nadim would most likely be ashamed of his once-condescending attitude. As he matured and developed into an intellectual and a nationalist, he displayed an amiable understanding and empathy for the Egyptian masses, considering them to be the true victims of British colonialism.[57] He also started to view his earlier experiences in the railway system more benevolently in comparison to what the railways now offered Egyptians. He complained that the colonial railway provided fewer jobs and far worse services for his fellow citizens. In the article "*al-Gharīb fī Waṭanihi*" (A Foreigner in His Own Country), al-Nadim hypothesized a young Egyptian who had returned to his home country after studying in Europe and the difficult conditions he faced when looking for gainful employment. He described:

"Imagine yourself coming back to your country after a seven years' absence. You arrive at Alexandria and find the great port managed by a harbormaster who is an English sailor. You land, collect your bags, and find yourself in a Custom House controlled by an English post office official. You go to Cairo by the main railway which you find administrated by an Anglo-Indian and a French railway employee. You send a telegram to your family to meet you by lines of text typed and transmitted by an English telegraphist or you send a letter from a postal service managed by another ex-official of the English Post Office…"[58]

The growing symbolic association of the railway with the common and everyday Egyptian people characterized many of Al-Nadim's writings. The confrontation was often carefully scripted to maximize the persuasive power of his literary work among his Egyptian readership. In another article entitled "*Hadhihi Hiya Madaniyuatuhum!*" (This is Their Civilization!), he further elaborated on the encroaching danger of foreign infrastructure and its untoward influence on the lives of common Egyptians:

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[57] Al-Nadīm, *Sulāfat*, vol. 1, 49. [double check page no.]
[58] *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Mar. 20, 1882.

"What has Western Europe done for us? It has given us what they call civilization—gas, railways, paved streets, machinery—yes, but do the peasants have better clothing, more comfortable houses, or are they better educated? No, they live in shacks that your horses and pigs would not deign to enter, and they have only the clothes on their backs; they work from sunrise to sunset, and everything they earn goes to the tax-collector."[59]

In the burgeoning discourse of popular nationalism, the foreign control of the Egyptian railway was not only in direct contradiction to Egypt's national sovereignty, but more significantly, it was in direct opposition to the Egyptian people—the ultimate audience, which Egyptian nationalism intended to mobilize. The loss of administrative control over the railway greatly affected Egyptian intellectuals' assessment of its role in Egypt's nation-building. For them, the railway was no longer a means of modernization that they could promote and support but rather was seen as a symbol of an imminent threat and a potential danger, a view shared by the imagined Egyptian community.

Reframing the Railway, Rebuilding the Nation

This chapter so far has presented two trends of *Nahdawi* thoughts about the railway. The first trend indicated that the railway was viewed as measureme of progress, a sentiment that Arab intellectuals promoted in extolling the railway as a vehicle of technological and civilizational advancement. In light of growing anticolonial sentiment, the second trend was critical of the railway, substantiating that it was a promoter of New Imperialism. This section further develops the second perspective, arguing that antagonism against the European-monopolized railway was not the only tenet of Egyptian nationalism. Nationalism was seen as a viable means to rediscover

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[59] *Al-Maḥrūsa*, Jan. 20, 1882.

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and redefine the state, about what Egypt was and about how Egyptians saw themselves. The advent of the British military railway into the Sudan and the subsequent development of the transcontinental Cairo-to-Cape railway project forged and solidified a robust African identity among the Arab intellectuals. This new vision of the nation re-established Egypt as the harbinger of the African revival, a revival that imagined the overthrow of the British imperial world order.

Although the Isthmus of Suez separated Egypt from the African continent, few people living along the Nile River before the nineteenth century identified themselves as Africans. For centuries, the spatial construction of Egypt was an integral part of Islam (*dār al-Islām*), and Cairo was undoubtedly one of its centers, from both a political and cultural perspective.[60] The Muslim majority believed that Islam brought them peace and prosperity, as well as security and protection against intrusion from non-believers. No Islamic history would be complete without Salah ad-Din (1137-1193), the Muslim hero who was victorious against European crusaders, and who the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt. The same historical regard was bestowed on the Battle of Ain Jalut (1260), in which Egyptian Mamluks decisively prevented Mongolian westward expansion. Egypt played a crucial role in Islamic history as Egyptians believed they lived in the realm of Islam. But with the acceleration of nineteenth-century modernization, some Egyptians, particularly those from the upper classes, espoused a new spatial connection. Egypt, in many aspects, became more comparable to Europe. Cairo's new urban planning, helping it to become known as the new "Paris along the Nile," was designed and built along European architectural principles. Steeped in French architecture, Cairenes themselves were enthusiastic about learning French. Even the Khedive

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[60] Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta* (New York: Brill, 1997).

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himself sometimes produced an illusory correlation that his country was a part of Europe.[61] This illusion revealed the forging of a new regime of sensory values in mid-nineteenth century Egypt, values that showed their consistent longings for Western European high culture.

The late nineteenth century marked a new turn in Egyptian geographical identity. Due to Egypt's chasm with the Ottoman Empire and its increasing belief that Europeans were foreign invaders, Egyptian intellectuals now needed to construct a new cultural identity, one with greater connection to Africa. Many of them turned to the Sudan for inspiration. Historically speaking, Egypt was never disconnected from sub-Saharan Africa. Known as the land of the blacks (*bilād as-sudān*), the territory of today's Sudan had always been an important source of slaves for Egyptian households. Notably, the situation remained prevalent even after Khedive Ismail's attempt to abolish slavery.[62] For Arab intellectuals, the land south of Egypt also produced indefinite imaginations to compare, to analyze, and often to demonstrate the superiority of the Islamic civilization against the non-believers and the "uncivilized."[63] As Eve Powell posits, "the hierarchy of political and economic relations from one end of the Nile Valley to the other" perpetuated thinking of the Arab intellectuals and usually functioned as a differentiating criteria that demarcated the Arab from the black.[64] Building on Powell's argument, I contend that the Sudan was more than an "inferior other," and that Arab intellectuals did more than merely mimick the European-civilizing model towards the Sudanese. The Sudan, starting from the late nineteenth century, gained its own cultural cache and significance. In fact, the Sudan became an increasingly

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[61] The original expression was "my country [Egypt] is no longer in Africa; we are now part of Europe. It is therefore natural for us to abandon our former ways and to adopt a new system adapted to our social conditions." Robert T. Harrison, *Gladstone's Imperialism in Egypt: Techniques of Domination* (Greenwood Press, 1995), 53.

[62] Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), [page no.]

[63] For instance, the above mentioned classification of Rifaʻa al-Ṭahṭāwī about savage nations, barbaric nations, and civilized nations were to a large extent based on his observation of the Sudan, Nubia, and Egypt or the Arab world.

[64] Eve Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 17.

important part of Egyptian national identity, as key Egyptian nationalist figures Mustafa Kamil and Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed constantly referred to and promoted a pan-regionalism that underscored the "the unity of the Nile Valley."[65] It was risky to make such an intellectual pivot from exclusion to inclusion, as previous Islamic scholarship had never really viewed, let alone conceptualized, the land of the blacks within its own territory. Additionally, the westernized Egyptian upper classes had always held a deep-rooted prejudice and bias against the Sudanese, who they often times disparaged as "barbarians."

Due to such, the railway was vital for the new spatial construction that included sub-Saharan Africa in Egypt's national imagination, one that required equal citizenship. Built alongside the Nile River, the railway confirmed the geographical continuity between Egypt and the Sudan. It further promised an integrated regional economy that, from the Egyptian perspective, could lead to Sudan's modernization. The idea of connecting to the Sudan with a railway line became crystallized in the thoughts of Ali Mubarak. In fact, he had already successfully persuaded Khedive Ismail to build a commercial line from Wadi Halfa to Sarras in 1874. Most survey work for this line had already been completed. But lack of financial support from Ismail's depleted treasury postponed its construction. Eventually, this delay turned into a permanent demise when *the Caisse de la Dette Publique* decided to intervene in 1876.[66] As Ismail was dethroned, Mubarak's window of opportunity to build the Egyptian-Sudanese railway was lost. Instead of building this railway, he recorded his complete vision of this railway in his encyclopedic work *al-Khiṭat al-Tawfiqiyya al-Jadīda lil-Miṣr al-Qāhira* (*Tawfiq's New Plans for the Cairo of Egypt*):

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[65] Rami Ginat, *Egypt and the Struggle for Power in Sudan: From World War II to Nasserism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 61-86.

[66] R. Hill and R. H. Hill, "The Suakin-Berber Railway, 1885," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. 20, No.1 (1937), 107-124.

"As a few [railways] connect the Sudanese countries, the Sudanese who have not previously freed themselves from barbarism and savagery, once they enter the Egyptian hearth, they will soon taste the fruits of civilization and prosperity. Their residents will no longer feel isolated or experience poverty. Its vast land will be prosperous with plantations. The number of cities and towns will increase. Foreigners will live with security and wander freely. They will hold property and excavate Sudanese mines. [If] Egypt is connected to the Sudan, both sides will mutually benefit in this partnership." [67]

Mubarak did not limit the railway's importance solely to economic benefits. He further imagined that the railway could fully integrate the two cultures, as daily contact and interaction instigated by railway transportation served as a means to develop a sense of shared purpose and community. Indeed, cultural hierarchy was still predominant in Mubarak's worldview and to a large extent, the Sudan's lack of railway transportation seemed to confirm its inferior, less civilized status. Yet, Mubarak pointed to a concrete channel through which the Sudanese also acquired the *Nahdawi* spirits of reason and progress, a way for the Sudan to become like Egypt:

"When the Sudan reaches a level of prosperity and security, trade [with the Sudan] will expand and Egypt will also receive countless benefits. This is because once the Sudanese of that institution [railway administration] gain cultural awareness, they will divest themselves of their crude and savage clothing, and experience the fruits of culture and knowledge. Among themselves, they will establish a sense of obligation that promotes commerce and handicraft. They will all learn the benefits of civic participation, community building, and work cooperatives. They will gain friendship and intimacy, as well as a good disposition. They will seek to organize their

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[67] Ali Mubarak, *al-Khiṭat al-Tawfīqiyya al-Jadīda lil-miṣr al-Qāhira* (Cairo: Markaz Tahqiq al-Turath, 1987, 2nd edition), vol. 7, 243.

conditions and improve their status. By then, they will be devoted to serving their land, and will receive a variety of benefits."

Mubarak's idea of a spatial connection between Egypt and the Sudan symbolized their temporal inequality. The railway was the carrier of the Sudan from the past to the present, a present where Egypt and civilization was located. The future oriented towards the union of these two countries, the one-time barrier eliminated by the railway. Scholarship on Egyptian nationalism has focused much on the reinvention of the pharaonic past.[68] Yet this complicated ideology also denoted the continuity of the recent past to the future, a temporal continuum sustained by new technologies—the train as the vehicle that brought human beings forward. The railway granted an Egyptian vision of it becoming the leader of Africa, a leader that gained its power vis-à-vis its European colonizers.

Mubarak, in fact, never had the chance during his career life to demonstrate whether he was a dedicated reformer of the Sudan or whether he was what Eve Powell controversially maintains, a "colonized colonizer."[69] But the more visible British colonialism supported Mubarak's initiative, granted in a much more radical fashion, one that Mubarak himself would probably have criticized. In urgent need of a reliable logistical line against the Sudanese Mahdist Revolt (1881-1899), the British prioritized the railway project as an indispensable part of its military conquest. Egypt, as a British subordinate, was also involved in the project, even during a time of dire financial difficulty. The Egyptian Army Railway Battalion was formed in support of the Corps of Royal Engineers of the British Army. In 1898, the Egyptian battalion consisted of 33

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[68] Donald M. Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
[69] Eve Powell, *Another Shade*, 6.

staff officers, 2 quartermasters, and 2,882 noncommissioned officers and labor force.[70] The British project was purely driven by its military needs. Whereas Ali Mubarak's plans called for comprehensive development, the British neither pursued economic development nor cultural communication. For all intents and purposes, Mubarak's vision was never realized.

As a result of New Imperialism's monopoly over railway rights in Africa, Mubarak's and other native modernization plans remained only in writings and as unrealized ideas. Nevertheless, these thwarted ideas were equally as powerful as fully executed plans. As Arab intellectuals reinterpreted the imperial railway, they also projected distinctive meanings and extended new conceptualization that that gave rise to the Egyptian nation. In this respect, some imperial projects could be appropriated for constructing Egyptian national identity. The Cape to Cairo Railway served as a typical example. Originally an idea espoused by Edwin Arnold, a British journalist for the *Daily Telegraph,* in 1874, the trans-African route initially proposed a mixture of railway and inland water transport that traversed the African continent.[71] When British business tycoon Cecil Rhodes further developed the proposal, he proposed that the route should be a contiguous and uninterrupted railway line crossing the entire African continent. The Cape to Cairo Railway was by no means limited to a figment of Rhodes's imagination. Within the grand theme of the "scramble for Africa," the British empire also sought to link all its dominions in Africa into a continuous "red line," to which the railway corresponded.[72] Therefore, the conventional narrative views the Cape to Cairo Railway as a combination of Rhodes's business interests and British imperial expansion in Africa.

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[70] Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, *"City of Steel and Fire": A Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906-1984* (Greenwood, 2002), 29.

[71] Leo Weinthal, *The Story of the Cape to Cairo Railway & River Route from 1887 to 1922* (London: Pioneer Pub. Co., 1923). 4-5.

[72] Robert Williams, *The Cape to Cairo Railway: Address to the African Society, 21st April, 1921* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1922). Vindex, *Cecil Rhodes: His Political Life and Speeches, 1881-1990, with Portrait in Photogravure and a Map* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1990).
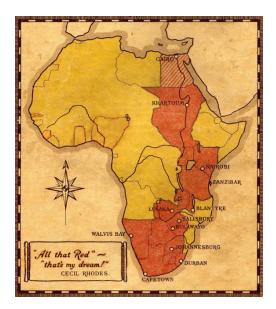
Figure 2 Cecil Rhodes's Vision of the Cape to Cairo Railway and British dominions in Africa[73]

Many Arab intellectuals would disagree that the Cape-to-Cairo Railway was a purely imperial enterprise. They valued the railway's emancipatory power more than its colonizing effect. Jurgi Zaydan, for instance, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century argued that poverty and its attendant backwardness on the African continent lay in its ill-planned transportation systems. The record-breaking long rail line would completely solve this problem, as the two ports in Egypt and South Africa would help integrate Africa into the world's economy. Meanwhile, Zaydan was completely aware of European colonialism and its ambitious enterprise. He noted, "European countries after the Renaissance used colonialism to hover around [Africa] as if [Africa]

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[73] Vindex, *Cecil Rhodes*, appendix. The picture is colored in the electronic copy.

was prey that Europeans could catcg for clothing or grab whatever they can with their claws." However, Zaydan viewed European colonialism as a reversible phenomenon, which was a by-product of nineteenth-century discoveries and innovations (ʾiktishāfāt waʾikhtirāʿāt) that targeted non-European residents. The new twentieth century, as Zaydan optimistically pointed out, would be a century of "African revival" (ʾihyāʾ qāra ʾifrīqiyya).[74] Zaydan reemphasized technology's emancipatory power, reckoning that Africans would take advantage of their masters' tools for their own ends, and as a means to eventually surpass their colonizers.

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[74] "African Railway between Cairo and Cape Town," *al-Hilāl*, 1905, vol. 14, 154-56.

خريطة افريقيا بما دخل فيها من السلطات الافرنجية ومسير الخط الحديدي من القاهرة الى رأس الرجاء

Figure 3 "An African Map with African Ruling Powers and the Cape to Cairo Railway," from

al-Hilāl. In this map, the territory marked with slashes was controlled by Egypt (including

today's Egypt and the Sudan) and the dotted areas were British (including today's Kenya,

Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa). It represented the unity of an Egyptian-Sudanese railway

under Egyptian sovereignty.[75]

Moreover, the newspaper al-Hilāl did not even recognize the project's ownership as British,

as belonging solely to Cecil Rhodes. In their estimate, it was, instead, a joint venture of Britain

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[75] "African Railway between Cairo and Cape Town," *al-Hilāl*, 1905, vol. 14, 155.

and Egypt, as each party possessed one end of the railway line. In another article published in 1918, Zaydan further divided the line into three sections: the northern section from Cairo to Khartoum, the southern section from Cape Town to Bukama, and the middle section in Uganda and Congo. The northern section belonged to the Egyptian government. The southern section was controlled and administered by the Rhodes company. The middle section was under dispute because of the ongoing colonial rivalry between Germany and Belgium.[76] By mapping this cartography, Zaydan deliberately denied the British occupation of Egypt, which reached its apex during World War I. Indeed, the Egyptian government was nominally in charge of the Egyptian State Railway, yet still under the mandate of British officials. Particularly during the war, the requisition of train cargo and railway tracks for military use became so rampant that it incurred massive resentment in the Egyptian populace. By recognizing the African railway as a joint venture of Britain and Egypt, Zaydan refused to acknowledge Egypt's political inferiority vis-à-vis its colonizing power and created a metaphorically equal status between the two countries.

In nationalist discourse, Egypt was Africa's estuary, the northern gate of discovering its potential, and the way to lift itself from its colonized, subordinate status. An uninterrupted railway that careened through Egypt and Sudan provided both a physical and imaginative justification for the nationalist claim of the "unity of the Nile Valley." However, many practical issues prevented the unity of Egyptian and Sudanese railways. First, railways in the two countries were never physically linked together. A ferry was used to connect Shellal, the southernmost town of Egypt, with the Sudan railhead at Wadi Halfa.[77] Because of this physical disconnection, many experts of the Sudanese railway have long claimed that Sudanese railways were independent from any

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[76] "Railway from Cairo to Cape Town," *al-Hilāl*, vol. 22, 1918, 759-60.
[77] H. A. Morrice, "The Development of Sudan Communications—Part I," *Sudan Notes and Records* 30, no. 1 (1949): 1–38.

systems in other countries.[78] Second, all railway built in the Sudan applied the narrow-gauge standard of 1,067 mm, which differed from the standard 1,425 mm gauge used in the tracks of the Egyptian State Railways. This difference was an historical issue, as all British military railways built for the Mahdist War, including not only all tracks in the Sudan but also the Egyptian line from Luxor to Shellal, adopted the narrow gauge. The Rhodes lobbyists certainly exerted pressure on Herbert Kitchener, persuading the governor-general to adopt the track standard of the Rhodes business empire. By doing so, they could sell track materials and rolling stocks to the military railway, while easily thwarting other competitors, as the 1,067 mm was globally unique. In fact, Lord Cromer proposed, unsuccessfully, another possibility of a narrower gauge measuring between 610 to 762 mm.[79] Separate gauge systems caused many practical issues in transportation between Egypt and the Sudan. Trains and rolling stocks had to run through some form of conversion between gauges in Luxor, which caused delays, additional costs, and inconvenience.[80]

The third, and potentially the most lethal, challenge for a unified Egyptian-Sudanese railway was administrative division. By the end of the Mahdist War, the originally self-contained military railway was separated into two separate parts. The ESR managed the line from Luxor-to-Shellal. The rest of the lines south to Wadi Halfa were organized under the management of the Sudanese Railways (SR), which in 1908 was renamed the Sudan Government Railway (SGR). Headquartered in Atbara, the SGR was an independent agency under the Anglo-Egyptian consortium. Until 1925, all directors, assistants, and senior officials were British military and naval

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[78] John F. Due, "Rail and Road Transport in the Sudan," University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign Faculty Working Papers, 1977; G. N. Sanderson, "The Modern Sudan, 1820-1956: The Present Position of Historical Studies," *The Journal of African History* 4, no. 3 (1963): 435-61.

[79] H. Wilson Fox, "The Cape-to-Cairo Railway and Train Ferries," *The Geographical Journal* 55, no. 2 (1920): 72-101; David Sunderland ed., *Communication in Africa, 1880-1939* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012; Mohamed Hassan Fadlalla, *Short History of Sudan* (New York: iUniverse, Inc.: 2004), 136.

[80] In 1926, the ESR transformed the Luxor-Shellal line into the standard gauge, which guaranteed more convenient transport within the Egyptian railways. See Sunderland ed., *Communication in Africa*,

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officials. No Egyptians were eligible to achieve a high rank in this system.[81] The ESR and the SGR, from then on, did not communicate as they received orders from and submitted reports to different governments.

Until today, Egypt and the Sudan are still disconnected by rail. Multiple proposals have been presented but without final implementation. The rail divide is a colonial artifact, rooted in the initial construction of the British military railways. In opposition to this artifact, many Arab intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century envisioned a continuous Egyptian-Sudanese line that paralleled the flow of the Nile. But none of them were able to carry out their vision. The British tactic of divide and conquer posed an insurmountable obstacle. When tracks were laid, standards were set, and institutions were established, little room remained for the actualization of their nationalist ambitions. Even though Fuad I could call himself "the King of Egypt and Sovereign of Nubia, the Sudan, Kurdufan and Darfur," it was impossible to overthrow all these social consequences and start anew. As the nationalist dream of uniting the Nile Valley by means of an uninterrupted railway faded, its only remnants remain buried in the dust of the Arabic literary writings.

Conclusion

This chapter overviews the shifting representations of the railway manifested in the writings of the Arabic-speaking intelligentsia from the 1870s until the 1910s. I cover three major phases in which the *Nahdawi* intellectuals assigned different meanings to the railway. I argue that these meanings did not fluctuate randomly; they were unavoidably intertwined with writers' personal experiences and the social conditions of their time. Initially, the *Nahdawi* intellectuals

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[81] Sikainga, *"City of Steel and Fire,"* 26-7.

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accepted and approved of the new transportation technology as both a legitimate and tangible measure of progress, the measure that eventually motivated Egypt to carry out a series of technological reforms in order to replicate the success of their European precursors. But their dream of a Europeanized Egypt was soon impeded by British colonization in 1882. The railway, under British control, turned from a symbol of universal progress into the embodiment of imminent and ever encroaching New Imperialism, guaranteed its stigma. Due to these circumstances, nationalist-inclined intellectuals felt the urgent need to redirect discourses on the railway towards another possibility. By pinning their political aspirations on a complete and Egyptian-controlled railway system, they also solidified their ideas of an African-oriented Egyptian identity.

With the ever-changing meanings of the railway, the *Nahdawi* intellectuals vacillated between the concrete infrastructure of the railway—the physical object that people were in touch with on a daily basis—and the body of knowledge they prioritized for the public. This vacillation during the colonial occupation was precarious. On the one hand, they were committed to rebutting the growing colonial discourse that denied Egypt's compatibility with modernity. In this aspect, the *Nahda* movement represented a cultural reaffirmation and rediscovery inspired by European science and technology. On the other hand, the *Nahdawi* intellectuals could not turn a blind eye to the imperial domination of the railway. The increasing marginalization of Egyptians within railway institutions, as we will see in the next chapter, gradually garnered discontent among various groups of Egyptian society. The precarity nestled in the gap between the *Nahda* knowledge and the reality of railway infrastructure. This fissure demanded a solution.

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Page 2: [2] Commented [GBE5]	Gray Bevins	2/14/20 10:15:00 AM

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[AU]: Are you making a class argument/statement here? If so, it can be more straightforward.

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[AU]: Is the genre an autobiographical travelogue where Alam ad-Din is Mubarak's literary alter ego? If so, you'll want to rephrase to indicate this here.

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