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Timothy Mitchell

THE INVENTION AND REINVENTION OF THE EGYPTIAN PEASANT

Among the figures in the scholarly imagining of the post-colonial world, “the peasant” is a strange kind of presence. With this abstraction, a category of human being has become a field of expertise, the subject of his own scholarly journals, and the object of a distinct body of theory and description. “What are villagers in India, in Egypt, in Mexico *really like*?” the anthropologist George Foster asks, as he begins a brief history of the field. “For nearly fifty years anthropologists (by no means to the exclusion of others) have searched for answers [to this question] . . . living with villagers in order to question them and to observe their behavior, describing their findings in books and articles.” At first they called their research the study of “folk” societies, Foster says, but after World War II scholars “came to realize that ‘peasant’ is a more appropriate term, and thus was born the new subfield of ‘peasant studies.’”¹

Foster makes these remarks in his foreword to the book *Shahhat: An Egyptian* by Richard Critchfield, which he recommends for its accurate portrayal of what peasants everywhere are really like, and which has become a favorite of both hotel bookstores in Cairo and college-level introductions to the Third World in the United States. The book belongs to a genre of peasant studies for which scholarship on the Middle East, more than other parts of the Third World, has provided an important home, a genre I would call descriptive realism. Critchfield sets before us the peasant’s life “like a series of wonderfully composed photographs,” wrote one of the book’s reviewers; “when taken together, they make us see and feel the contours and the substance of fellah culture.”² Despite the claims of photographic realism, however, a careful reading of Critchfield’s book reveals his “real peasant” to be something constructed out of earlier representations, as a collage of familiar Orientalist images juxtaposed with clippings taken—in fact plagiarized—from earlier writings, in particular from the previous popular study in a similar genre, *The Egyptian Peasant* by Henry Ayrout.

The following pages examine the genealogy of Critchfield’s Egyptian peasant, not just to bring to light these forms of repetition and borrowing but to ask some larger questions. What is the nature of this realist genre in peasant studies? Why is the Middle East, with its dearth of more critical examinations of rural society, so well represented? Why are the results so widely accepted, acquiring so easily the status of classics? Why does the realism of the peasant’s portrayal seem to require not only the borrowings from earlier writings but also the exclusion from

the picture of history, of the West, and of the presence of the Western author? Overall, what political processes are at work in the producing and reproducing of all this realism?

The emergence of peasant studies as a new field of expertise, half a century or more ago, can be located quite precisely, in the widespread rebellions that rural populations were able to organize against occupying European powers during the interwar years. In the Middle East, for example, rural uprisings in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in the years after World War I were followed by the Palestinian uprising of 1936–1939, the first sustained anticolonial revolt, which required one-third of Britain’s armed forces to suppress it and a commission of colonial experts to examine rural life in Palestine and explain the rebellion’s causes. In Indochina, peasant uprisings during the early 1930s that succeeded in establishing self-governing soviets were the background to studies such as Pierre Gourou’s classic *Paysans du delta tonkinoise* (1936), a work advising the colonial authorities of the “delicate” task they faced in preserving the existing Vietnamese “moral and social” system that it meticulously describes—along with the peasants’ “strikingly wretched material conditions”—and warning them that if the author’s words were ignored and this “traditional” world allowed to collapse, the peasantry would then “have a clear picture of its poverty and would center its thoughts on it.”³ As the rebellions spread, the expertise kept up. The uprising in Palestine affected provincial Egypt, where political organizing and economic protest intensified during the late 1930s. Several diagnoses of the peasant condition were put into print, including Father Ayrout’s famous study of the Egyptian peasant, first published under the title *Moeurs et coutumes des fellahs* in 1938, which claimed to “photograph” for the first time “the realities of peasant life” among Egyptians—and which compared itself, in turn, to the work on Vietnam by Gourou.⁴

The picture of what peasants are really like has a curious history, as the subsequent reissuing of these kinds of texts reflects. Gourou’s study was translated into English in 1955, by the Human Relations Area Files, Inc., and between the late 1960s and mid-1970s became one of the most important sources for studies on peasant revolt in Vietnam.⁵ Ayrout’s work was translated into Arabic (1943) and English (1945), and then, following the shifting focus of foreign interest in Egypt, into Russian in the 1950s and finally into English again in the United States in 1963.⁶ By the early 1960s, American scholars were becoming increasingly interested in the question of peasant politics, urged on by events in Indochina and elsewhere and by figures such as Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles, who as chairman of the Democratic Platform Committee in the 1960 elections had secured American commitment to a new economic policy towards the Third World.⁷ Ayrout’s *Egyptian Peasant* was published with an introduction by the sociologist Morroe Berger of Princeton, who noted, 25 years after the book’s first edition, that although political feelings in rural Egypt had still “hardly begun to develop,” the government of President Nasser was now seeking “to awaken ambition and expectation among the peasants.”⁸ These observations were preceded by a foreword from Chester Bowles himself, warning that every-

where in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, “peasants are rousing themselves from apathy and despair to ask hard economic and political questions” and that with the spread of “communist agitators” they now “constitute fertile ground for subversion and unrest.”⁹

American interest in having Nasser deal with rural agitation and unrest subsided in the mid-1960s, after the Egyptians failed to fit their domestic and foreign policy to America’s expanding regional interests. The need to expand American power reflected difficulties encountered elsewhere, in particular, the intensification of the war in Vietnam. It is no coincidence that Vietnam was where Richard Critchfield first acquired his anthropological interest in peasant villages, while serving there as a reporter for the *Washington Star* from 1964 to 1967. “What began as the reporting of events (conventional journalism),” he explained autobiographically, “ended in the study of the culture of ordinary people (amateur anthropology). It was that kind of war,” he added, echoing the sentiments of the French ethnographer Pierre Gourou: “By 1967 the restoration of traditional Vietnamese values was the only chance left of saving the country.”¹⁰ Critchfield’s first book, *The Long Charade: Political Subversion in the Vietnam War* (1968), presented to American readers the views of British military advisers in South Vietnam, who represented a colonial expertise accumulated earlier in Malaya, Palestine, and elsewhere. The war in Vietnam, he explained with their help, was not a struggle for national liberation but a problem of “law and order.” The government’s police force had been weakened by terrorism in the countryside, and only by reestablishing “permanent security in the towns and villages” could “traditional” leaders and values be reestablished.¹¹ “The villagers were the key. But how to *get to know them* [emphasis added] well enough to help them against the terrorism which was destroying their confidence and their culture.”¹² After leaving Vietnam, Critchfield went on to visit and write about villages in Indonesia, India, Iran, and finally Egypt, where he spent several months during 1974 and 1975 getting to know the Upper Egyptian village that was to be the subject of *Shahhat: An Egyptian*, his first full-length village study.

The year 1974–1975 marked the beginning of a new American interest in rural Egypt, as President Sadat abandoned his predecessor’s policies, aligned his foreign policy with the United States, and opened up the country to private capital investment. *Shahhat* was published in 1978, two months after Sadat’s journey to Jerusalem and at the height of his popularity in the United States. The Chairman of the Democratic National Committee this time around had been Robert Strauss, who was now a Middle East adviser to the White House and the coordinator of Sadat’s visits to the United States, including the Camp David negotiations with Israel later that year. Although *Shahhat* failed to get a foreword from Strauss to match Ayrout’s foreword from Chester Bowles, the author’s introduction inadvertently locates the study of peasants in the context of U.S. interests in Egypt, including the interests of men like Robert Strauss. The introduction summarizes an interview the author obtained with Sadat, who is described as “Egypt’s first ruler of truly *fellaheen* origins” (in fact he was the son of a minor functionary employed by the British army in Egypt, and moved from the provinces to Cairo as a young child).¹³ The President, we are told, “was

deeply concerned about the disruptive effect of rapid change as raised in this story, especially in the villages,” and his plans for rural Egypt included switching to “high-value cash crops” and “investing heavily in agri-industry.” Transferring farmland out of village control into large commercial hands coincided with the interests of American agribusiness corporations, including Coca-Cola and Pepsico, for whom Camp David confirmed the ending of the Egyptian boycott of American soft drink companies and the opening up of a vast new market. Both companies embarked on investment projects in Egypt in the late 1970s, including a 20,000-acre citrus-growing project to produce soft-drink concentrates negotiated jointly by Taha Zaki (an adviser to the Egyptian government on “food security”) and a director of Pepsico—the White House adviser, Robert Strauss.¹⁴

It was in this crucial period of American interest in the Egyptian economy and society that Critchfield published his account of what rural Egyptians are really like. As with “any story set in the Third World today, particularly the Arab world,” we are warned, the book deals with the difficult ground of “cultural and psychological turbulence.” Shahhat, the rather petulant adolescent who is the story’s central character, is said to be in many ways “typical of the great mass of poor Egyptians,” and since his fellow villagers “all represent people found in the rural Third World today,” the author tells us that he “found Shahhat and his problems exemplary.” The problems involved are those that face a violence-prone adolescent as he adjusts to the recent death of his weak and alcoholic father amid the demands of an adoring and overbearing mother (as Robert Fernea remarks in his review of the book, “Freudian constructs haunt the scene”).¹⁵ Presented as “the story of how a deeply traditional Egyptian, when faced with sudden changes in his way of life, . . . comes of age,” Shahhat’s life is to be read as an individual enactment of the larger drama of “modernization,” in which villagers who have “never changed their way of life” in more than 6,000 years are forced to adjust to modernity in less than a decade.¹⁶

The notion of a village life unchanged in sixty centuries is, of course, a complete fiction. During the 19th century alone, this region of Upper Egypt had seen the decline and virtual elimination of long-distance trade with India, Arabia, and the Sudan; the collapse of the local textile industry; the introduction and spread of private landowning, of export crops, of mechanical irrigation methods, and of epidemic diseases such as cholera. Large commercial farms were established, including the “feudal” estate to which Shahhat’s village belonged up until the 1952 revolution, which became a sugarcane plantation supplying the Kom Ombo Sugar Company. European armies arrived—the village of Qurna, adjacent to Shahhat’s village, was long remembered locally for its inhabitants’ armed resistance to the French soldiers of Napoleon¹⁷—and villagers themselves were conscripted for the first time into a modern Egyptian army and forced to pay the taxes to support it. In 1822–1823, artisans and peasants in the region rebelled against conscription, taxation, and the destruction of local textile manufacturing, gathered a force of several hundred armed men, and established their headquarters in Shahhat’s village of Berat [al-Ba^cirat]. They marched on the local garrison and sacked it, causing the rebellion to spread throughout the surround-

ing countryside, but the government then dispatched European-led reinforcements who burned Berat to the ground and rounded up and massacred the insurgents.¹⁸ Police stations and telegraph lines were later built, and steamships and railways came, carrying government inspectors, European engineers, and great quantities of tourists and archaeologists, many of whom encamped in or near Shahhat's village which lies at the foot of the Theban necropolis, burial place of King Tut, perhaps the most famous archaeological and tourist site in the world. It is this place that Critchfield introduces to us as an untouched and therefore typical corner of the Third World, a hamlet "so obscure it barely has a name."¹⁹

This blindness to historical transformation is carefully achieved. The essence of Critchfield's method is to assure us at frequent intervals that everything we encounter in rural Egypt we have somehow seen before, in some exotic image from the past. Egyptian peasants are familiar in advance to those who have visited museum exhibits of ancient Egypt. Shahhat's mother, for example, is immediately recognizable, for she has "the peculiarly straight nose, oval face, fair complexion, and large lustrous eyes familiar from ancient Egyptian statues and paintings."²⁰ In fact throughout Upper Egypt, we are told, "the facial and physical appearance of the villagers" resembles that of "the hundreds of statues and busts in the Cairo Museum."²¹ Then there are the inevitable echoes of the Bible. When he rescues a blonde female tourist from the cliff above the village, angrily chasing off some village boys who were following her, we are told that Shahhat, "in his black robes against the blindingly white rocks with the open blue sky all about, seemed very much of a wrathful Old Testament figure."²² We also get a quotation from the *Rubayyat* of Omar Khayyam²³ and several reminders of the *Thousand and One Nights*. A villager named Mitri, we are told, "resembled an old gnome out of the Arabian Nights"²⁴ and even the infamous Habu Hotel, built in the village about a decade before as a hangout for the younger kind of European tourist, has "a medieval Arabian Nights air."²⁵ Everything is encountered, it seems, as the original of something ancient and exotic that one has already seen in a museum, or read about in the literature of Orientalism, or imagined from the distant past.²⁶

But Critchfield's most important means of making peasant life seem something exotic and thus unchangingly familiar is his reliance on more recent writings, in particular the work of Henry Ayrout. He paraphrases *The Egyptian Peasant* from the opening pages. "Foreign conquerors have come and gone—the Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, French and English. As Henry Habib Ayrout once observed, while the Upper Egyptian villagers changed their masters and their religion, their language and their crops, they never changed their way of life."²⁷ Even Shahhat's village of Berat, where Critchfield stayed, is seen through Ayrout's eyes. The Egyptian village, wrote Ayrout, "forms a closed system . . . [of] habits, customs and taboos handed down from the distant past."²⁸ Forty years later, Critchfield discovers that Shahhat's village "was in fact a closed system," which "preserved habits, customs, and taboos handed down from pharaonic times."²⁹ The peasant, Ayrout explained in his most famous line,

“preserves and repeats, but does not originate anything.”³⁰ Egyptian peasants, Critchfield unselfconsciously reiterates, “preserved and repeated, but did not originate, create, or change.”³¹

Thus, Critchfield’s village turns out to be the exotic kind of place we have somehow always visited before—in museums, Arabian Nights, and guide books, but above all in studies of the Egyptian peasant. As we will see, the extent of this familiarity is quite astonishing in Critchfield’s case. Yet he is not the first to present rural Egypt as a living museum, familiar to us in advance through countless earlier texts and images. If one turns back to Ayrout, one encounters a similar problem. Rural Egyptians, Ayrout tells us in his first chapter (entitled “Changelessness”), are “as impervious and enduring as the granite of their temples, and as slow to develop.” The images one has of their daily life, whether from “Pharaonic tombs or from Coptic legend, from Arab historians or the *Description of Egypt*, from early English researchers or the travellers of our own day, seem to form a single sequence. . . . These scenes, though separated by so many centuries, only repeat and confirm one another.”³² The American edition of Ayrout adds that urban Egyptians who know nothing of the countryside and find it inaccessible by private car can now visit instead an agricultural museum in Cairo, which has been built “to introduce them to village life.”³³ Like Critchfield, however, Ayrout also reads rural Egypt through the pages of a more popular text, in this case the work of the turn-of-the-century French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon. Before continuing with my reading of Critchfield and showing the extent of his dependence on Ayrout, I will examine Ayrout’s own dependence on the work of Le Bon and explore how this dependence helped establish Ayrout as the classic study of the Egyptian peasant.

Le Bon’s writings, including *Les lois psychologiques de l’évolution des peuples* and his famous work *Psychologie des foules* (The Crowd), both of which were translated into Arabic and widely read in Cairo, were addressed to two pressing political questions of his day: how to explain scientifically the difference between advanced and backward societies, and how to explain scientifically the difference within a society between the mass of its people and the elite.³⁴ To account for these differences, Le Bon introduced the concept of a people’s psyche or soul, a “collective mind” that consists of ideas, feelings, and beliefs and is created by a process of slow, hereditary accumulation. This accumulation, claimed Le Bon, which is the measure of a people’s evolution, occurs not among the mass of a nation but largely among its elite. Between the masses in a country such as Egypt, therefore, and those in parts of Europe, the difference in level of development might be small. “What most differentiates Europeans from Orientals is that only the former possess an *élite* of superior men.” It is this elite that “constitutes the true incarnation of the forces of a race.”³⁵ In his work on the crowd, described by Gordon Allport as “possibly the most influential book ever written in social psychology,” Le Bon employed the same principle to explain social differences within a society.³⁶ The crowd or mass (*la foule*), he explained, is composed of cells so merged together that they constitute a “provisional being,” with an unconscious collective mind. In this merger, individual mental differences, which he had shown to be the source of all excellence, are lost. The

loss of individuality, Le Bon concluded, makes the crowd into a less intelligent being, like a child, or a backward nation or race. The backward nation and the crowd represent parallel states of mental inferiority, both caused by the absence of individuality.³⁷

Henry Ayrout adopted the vocabulary and thinking of Le Bon to explain the nature of the Egyptian peasant. "The fellah should always be spoken of in the plural," he wrote, "because he lives always as a member of a group, if not of a crowd."³⁸ The peasant "is like a primitive man or child,"³⁹ he explained, for like the primitive or the child he has "little individuality." This is reflected in the "formlessness" of his village,⁴⁰ where "all is dust and disorder. There is no plan or system, and not a single straight line."⁴¹ The lack of form and structure indicates the absence of individuality because without straight lines one cannot have individual houses. Like their occupants, the buildings are not separate units but are merged together and indistinguishable from one another, like cells "in the agricultural hive."⁴² The absence of individual houses reflects, in turn, the absence of distinct families. The family too has no individual identity but simply "shades off into a wider community more or less closely interrelated by blood and marriage. . . . Just as the house is not a complete unit by itself, neither is the family which lives in it. As there is no real 'home' . . . so there is no real 'family'."⁴³ Individuality and structure are also missing at the level of the village: "nothing is more like one Egyptian village than another Egyptian village. Here is another example of the monotonous uniformity."⁴⁴ The village itself, it follows, "is not a community in the social sense, not an organism, but a mass (*une foule*)." And finally at the level of the peasantry as a whole and of the nation: "One might well talk of Egypt in the plural. There is no single Egyptian people . . . but only a seething assemblage of the most varied types. . . . Neither is there a true peasant community, but only a homogeneous mass (*une foule homogène*)." ⁴⁵

All these absences in turn reflect a more fundamental absence, the lack of individual mental life, or what Ayrout, following Le Bon, calls "personality." The peasant is "as little of a personality as he is of an individual," Ayrout explains.⁴⁶ The development of his intelligence, it seems, has "atrophied" and what there is of it "is collective rather than personal." He does not engage in "individual thinking." Several "essential features" of the Egyptian mentality follow from this situation. The peasant is habitually distrustful and therefore selfish, "cunning to the point of duplicity," fond of a "semi-conscious" state of torpor, and yet violent in the extreme when roused. His sense of justice is corrupt, and he lacks frankness, curiosity, ambition, sensibility, and initiative.⁴⁷ How to account for these monstrous mental absences? "Some sociologists put it down to masturbation, which is fairly common in the Islamic East." But according to Father Ayrout, that particular vice seems to be more common in urban areas, whereas these personality problems are more pronounced in the countryside.⁴⁸ He explains them instead in terms of the miserable condition of rural life, though the "real evils" are not the poverty and hardship itself but the peasant's "lack of education and culture," as a result of which "he does not feel the depth of his suffering,"⁴⁹ as well as the indifference of those who might help him, who

have failed to notice “the distress which he himself could not put into words, and perhaps only half felt.”⁵⁰

The solution that Ayrout suggests for this problem of an “*assemblage sans architecture, matériellement et intellectuellement*,” as the French original puts it,⁵¹ is a material and mental “reconstruction of the Egyptian village.” He supports the various proposals being put forward in the 1930s and 1940s to replace the villages of Egypt with geometrical “model villages,” of the sort already built on many of the country’s large commercial estates, combined with a program of rural education (to which he devoted his own later life) that would provide villagers with the mental architecture needed to cope with straight lines and separate houses.⁵² Such a program, Ayrout argues, is the responsibility of the Egyptian elite, or more specifically of a group he names the “rural middle class,” men like the nationalist leaders Sa‘d Zaghlul and Mustafa Nahhas, “conservative, gain-loving, unpretentious” types who “live in the country and keep a close eye on the yield of their feddans.” This class is to be distinguished from the very largest landowners, who live only in the city and, like their allies the British and the European-owned credit companies and agricultural processing industries, are opposed to rural reform.⁵³

As these proposals make clear, Ayrout’s work forms a part of the intense political struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, which pitted the rural poor against these rival dominant interests, and in which many other educated Egyptians were involved. In 1938 alone, for example, the year Ayrout’s book was published, there appeared Mirit Butrus Ghali’s *Siyāsāt al-ghad* (The Policy of Tomorrow) and Hafiz ‘Afīfī’s *Ala hāmish al-siyāsa* (On the Margins of Politics), each of which includes a detailed analysis of the rural population.⁵⁴ Later works included such major studies as Ibrahim Amir’s *al-Arḍ wa-al-Fallāḥ: al-Mas‘ala al-Zirā‘iya fī Miṣr* (Land and the Peasant: The Agrarian Question in Egypt). Ayrout’s contribution to this debate, in the familiar vocabulary of Le Bon, is to demonstrate how the peasantry lacks the ability even to feel their own suffering, and therefore requires the political intervention—as Le Bon had always stressed—of the nationalist elite, whose role is to revive the rural population, and yet, indicating the political dangers involved, to “awaken without exciting.”⁵⁵ The duty of the rural elite, explains Ayrout, is “to liberate the fellah’s spirit from its stifling envelope of mud. . . . The initiative can never come from his own community, which is completely numbed and powerless, but only from the classes which overshadow him, from the *élite*, who with their riches of mind and money can vitalize him. In this dough must work the leaven of intelligence and sympathy.”⁵⁶

This is the complex genealogy of the work that was to reappear in the United States in 1963, described on its cover by the Harvard Orientalist Hamilton A. R. Gibb as “a classic in its field.”⁵⁷ By what process had it become a classic? First, there was what the *American Sociological Review* called “its continued relevance and its virtual monopoly of the subject”—25 years after the first edition. The book was not the only study of the Egyptian peasant since the 1930s, as we have just seen (indeed, the true classic during this period was Ibrahim Amir’s *al-Arḍ wa-al-fallāḥ*, which influenced a whole generation of Egyptian scholars, yet was

never translated into English). But Ayrout's book had acquired its continued relevance and hence monopoly in the minds of Western Orientalists by its ahistorical method of explanation, in which the condition of rural Egypt is attributed not to political and economic forces of the day but to a timeless peasant mentality. Then there was the book's realism. H. A. R. Gibb claimed that it "holds up a mirror to the peasantry as they are." A mirror is the correct metaphor, but, as we saw, it is a mirror reflecting not some original peasant reality but a series of other mirrors, ranging from the French *Description d'Egypte* and the writings of 19th-century European travelers to the exhibits in the Egyptian museum and, above all, the work of Gustave Le Bon. Such a system of mirrors produced an image of the peasantry appropriate to Ayrout's political concerns and pastoral sympathies. But their overall effect was to make the book appear to confirm everything Orientalism had always suspected concerning the mentality and way of life of Egyptians, thus guaranteeing its reception as a classic. It was no accident, furthermore, that Father Ayrout had been educated in France and wrote his study in French as a dissertation for a French university. Unlike works in Arabic, it was readily available for translation into British, Russian, and American editions.

The final mechanisms for rendering the book a classic were the requirements of post-war American politics, in particular the complex of development programs and university Middle East courses. The English edition of 1945 was made available in the United States through the Human Relations Area Files, and apparently an initial American translation was produced by the Point Four program, presumably as an introduction to rural Egypt for American development experts.⁵⁸ "There is no better book," *The Economist* remarked confidently when the Beacon Press edition finally appeared in 1963, "on the magnitude of President Nasser's domestic task in rural Egypt."

Despite its status as a classic, the book required updating for the American edition, and also some minor yet significant rewriting by the author. Several references to the political violence commonly used by Egyptian peasants in their efforts to resist exploitation were deleted or amended in the U.S. edition, replacing them with an image of "passive and obedient" villagers. For example, the original text describes the reaction of a group of peasants to an attempt to take possession of their *'izba* (the workers' housing complex on a large commercial estate, which often evolved into a self-contained village while the houses, fields, agricultural equipment, and even domestic animals remained the estate owner's property) by a financial institution that had foreclosed on its owner:

When the bank's bailiff arrived to carry out the seizure, the villagers resisted him, and the police had to interfere. The assistant chief constable of the *markaz* [district] arrived on the scene at the head of an armed force, but was attacked by the people. Seeing that the situation promised to grow more serious, he felt himself obliged to order shots to be fired in the air to frighten the fellaheen. The effect was to exasperate them. They proceeded to cut the telephone wires and to burn the bailiff's car. A new body of police soon came to the rescue, but proved as useless as the first. Finally the Mudeer [provincial governor] appeared on the scene at the head of yet a third force and order was re-established only when further shots had been fired into the air. Seven of the policemen were wounded by

stones thrown at them by the villagers. Several villagers were arrested, and a judicial enquiry was opened. This incident, which took place in 1936, is by no means abnormal.⁵⁹

In the American edition this paragraph has been removed and replaced by a single sentence: "Occasionally it was necessary to put the *ordinarily passive and obedient* peasants down with police force."⁶⁰ With such amendments some of the very few references in *Ayrout* to particular historical and political episodes were eliminated, and the book's timeless portrayal of a passive and unchanging Egyptian peasant was ready for the American reader.

We can now return to Critchfield. We have seen how he invokes *Ayrout* to support the image of an Egyptian village unchanged in 6,000 years, and we have seen the sources of these images in *Ayrout*, especially the borrowings from Le Bon, and their acceptance in the United States as a relevant and realistic portrayal of rural Egypt in the second half of the 20th century. Critchfield's role is to take up these fading images in the last quarter of the century and reprint them in new colors.

It is not just that Critchfield has read *Ayrout* before he arrives in the village, and sees the place through the earlier text. Matters are much worse—he is unable to put *Ayrout* down. For example, when Critchfield goes with Shahhat to the local market (*sūq*), he cannot help turning again to *The Egyptian Peasant*. "The market," *Ayrout* had explained,

lasts from dawn to midday. The sellers . . . make their way to it at daybreak in long files, choose a spot to lay out their wares, and squat down behind them to wait for customers. . . . All is a noisy, confused *mêlée* of men, cattle and goods.⁶¹

"The *suk*," Critchfield tells us,

lasted from dawn to mid-morning, and if Shahhat wanted to sell something, he came at daybreak, chose a spot along the road to display his vegetables or tether his sheep, and squatted down to wait for customers. By eight o'clock the *suk* was a noisy, confused hubbub of men, women, children, cattle, and goods.⁶²

Further on *Ayrout* continued:

Here again can be seen the love of the *fellaheen* for crowding together and moving only in congested groups. If they have to cross the Nile . . . the *fellaheen* throng so densely into the ferry-boat . . . that accidents are frequent. When they set out on foot or on donkey-back, laden with astonishing bundles, it looks like an evacuation. . . . When they have to travel by train, they arrive several hours beforehand, cluster on a corner of the platform, and scramble all together into one carriage, even if there is plenty of room elsewhere.⁶³

And Critchfield:

Though there was plenty of space along the road, they all crowded together in one small area for the *fellaheen* loved congested groups. When they crossed the Nile everyone would throng into the same small ferry so that it was a wonder accidents were rare. When they took the train, they would arrive two or three hours early, cluster on one end of the platform and then scramble all together into a single carriage, even if there was plenty of room in the next one. The road through the *suk*, with so many people hurrying by on

donkey or on foot—most of them laden with enormous bundles . . .—resembled an evacuation.⁶⁴

But not as much as it resembled Ayroul's book.

How do the characters in Critchfield's drama cope with the strangely constructed world in which they find themselves? There is no problem, for they are constructed the same way. They are as preserved and repeated as the countryside they inhabit. In the chapter of his book on "The Peasant's Body," Ayroul describes under the heading "Race and Type" the racial features of the Egyptian—drawing, incidentally, on the scientific racism of writers like Gustave Le Bon. Ayroul notes that the peasant of Upper Egypt, being a mixture of Egyptian and "negro," is

heavily built [with] rather prominent cheekbones, a thick nose . . . and a heavy jaw. His features on the whole are rugged . . . neither very sensitive nor very expressive. [The Arab nomads] differ markedly from the fellaheen by their finer features . . . their more excitable temperament [and] their cruelty in vengeance.⁶⁵

Critchfield tells us that, "except for his curly black hair, with its hint of African negro blood," Shahhat "looked more Arabian than Egyptian." Most of the other young men in the village were

more heavily built, and had strong cheekbones, thick noses, and heavy jaws. Among their rugged faces, Shahhat's stood out as singularly sensitive and expressive. His finer, more Semitic features and more excitable temperament, his sense of vengeance that was not without its cruel side . . .

made Shahhat resemble the nomads of the desert—or at least the nomads of Ayroul's racial classification.⁶⁶

This racial vocabulary, once borrowed from Ayroul, recurs throughout Critchfield's story. The "vengeful Bedouin streak in Shahhat's blood" is continually invoked to explain his habitual violence.⁶⁷ His friends and associates are contrastingly "negro." In the "dark brown skin, curly hair, thick lips, and strong cheekbones," of his friend Snake, "there was something plainly African";⁶⁸ Faruk, Shahhat's sharecropper, has "wet, open lips,"⁶⁹ later described as "full, wet lips";⁷⁰ and Abdullahi, owner of the local bar, has a head and chest covered in "frizzy hair like a negro's."⁷¹ The racist effect is enhanced by most of the other descriptions of people's facial features. Hagg Ali, for example, has "cunning, calculating eyes, a hawk nose, wrinkled face, and an ingratiating, obsequious manner."⁷² When he gets annoyed this "cunning face" is "twisted into an angry, purple fury . . . the veins swelling on his forehead."⁷³ (Veins and muscles are continually swelling: when Shahhat gets angry his face and neck turn "crimson with all the muscles strained";⁷⁴ we meet with another whose "neck muscles stood out like ropes,"⁷⁵ and so on.) The face of Abdullahi, the bar owner, is "hideously pock-marked" and those of his customers always have "a demoniac look."⁷⁶ Bahiya's eyes are "dull and squinty" whereas Su'ad has "sly, viperish eyes."⁷⁷ Sheikh al-Hufni is "a bent, emaciated, toothless old man,"⁷⁸ as opposed to Yusef who is "bent, toothless, and garrulous."⁷⁹ El Got is "a slight, weaselly, pale little man,"⁸⁰ Mitri is "frail and wrinkled" like "an old gnome" with

“rheumy blue eyes,”⁸¹ the father of Faruk, the sharecropper, is a “shrunken little man,” Hasan, a “drunken scoundrel,” has “such a short, thick neck he looked hunch-backed,” Ali, Hasan’s son, is a “dull, slack-jawed youth,”⁸² and so on and so on.

Within this racial framework, Shahhat’s whole character seems to have been determined in advance by Ayrout. “Rural, gregarious, stay-at-home; such is the Egyptian people in its dominant characteristics,”⁸³ wrote Ayrout, noting later on “their love of the soil, their sense of rhythm, and their taste for songs, stories and colours.” The peasant’s intellect, he said, “is controlled by his senses, and remains close to things felt and done. . . . Life to him is a succession but of todays.”⁸⁴ Sure enough, Shahhat turns out to be “rural, gregarious, stay-at-home . . . With his love for the soil, his feel for physical labor and nature’s rhythms, his taste for songs, stories and gossip, his mind was governed by the senses and stayed close to things done and felt; life to him was a succession of todays.”⁸⁵ Not to mention a succession of plagiarisms.

Explaining the views on sexuality among his village hosts, Critchfield also borrows from Ayrout. “The temperament of the fellaheen,” Ayrout tells us,

is very ardent and sensual . . . [but] the heat of passion is short-lived. At thirty a fellah woman is no longer attractive, but the children she has borne her husband bind him to her. . . . The men . . . are kept faithful less by virtue than by village law.⁸⁶

According to Critchfield,

Ommohamed [Shahhat’s mother] knew that young men like Shahhat were ardent, sensual, and romantic, but that the heat of such passion cooled all too soon; after thirty or so it was the children . . . that bound a husband and wife together. In her eyes men were kept in place less by their own virtue than by Islamic law and village social pressure.⁸⁷

Perhaps even Ommohamed had been reading Ayrout.

Taking his cue from Ayrout, Critchfield turns the sexuality and violence of villagers into a major theme of the book. His Author’s Note at the beginning suggests that in Upper Egyptian villages “the occurrence of adultery, fornication, and sodomy, despite severe Moslem penalties, seems an assertion of pagan sensuality absent elsewhere in Egypt.”⁸⁸ The opening pages set the scene by invoking ancient Egypt as the source of this obscene and violent paganism. Shahhat’s mother is described, 20 years earlier, stealthily entering the ruins of a temple at night and observing the local pharaonic art. There are wall paintings portraying “a procession led by the god of the penis,” and reliefs depicting the pharaoh’s military victories show “mass decapitations and castrations, with heaps of genitals carved in stone.” The very sight of these genital heaps, we are told, causes local villagers to become “filled with lust.”⁸⁹ Soon after we are informed of the young Shahhat’s “growing sexual hunger” and told how “the size of his penis” became the object of village comment. Pride in their masculinity, it seems, creates in local men “a drive to reduce competing males to lesser status through domination, sadism, and even sodomy; dominance was everything.” Described in this way as animals, it comes as no surprise that the villagers commonly practice sodomy not just with other males but with animals too. Shahhat himself, Critchfield informs us, used to do it with a female donkey.⁹⁰

The rest of the book follows in much the same tone, telling us, page after page, of fights and stabbings and robberies and murders, of men who rape, men who bite off people's noses, and men who kill people and cut them into little pieces. Most of these events occurred before Critchfield came to the village, or while he was away in Cairo, and are related to him second or third hand by Shahhat, through an interpreter. Their second-hand quality is obvious. One story, for example, involves Shahhat's sharecropper, Faruk, a "drunkard and voluptuary" according to the caption under his photograph, who is involved in "every sort of debauchery, drinking heavily, smoking hashish, chasing women, and spending long hours gambling."⁹¹ One night, we are told, he met in the fields with a woman from a nearby village who used to sell herself occasionally for money. The couple were discovered, however, by two other villagers—"course, filthy, dishonest and drunken men"—who hit the woman, beat Faruk and tied him up, stripped the woman naked, and took turns to rape her, pausing when they were finished to untie Faruk and beat him again, "pounding and kicking him until he lost his senses." Almost every line of the story is clichéd, from "Faruk could not tear his eyes away as he listened to the woman's moans," to the description of the woman's breasts as, inevitably, "full" and "firm." We are also told by the author that she enjoyed being raped.⁹²

Critchfield retells this tale, not as an example of how a vexatious village youth offers colorful stories to a visiting American, but as details for his picture of what villagers, as Professor Foster's foreword puts it, are really like (indeed, Foster particularly praises Critchfield for bringing into view the "darker side" of peasant behavior—which, he assures us, given the peasants' poverty and lack of opportunity, "is highly adaptive").⁹³ Critchfield's factual presentation of such episodes is especially surprising since he admits, elsewhere in the book, that local stories could become "exaggerated and dramatized" as they "spread through the village"⁹⁴ and that Shahhat in particular "had ceased to be able to distinguish" between tales he had heard from others and those he had invented himself. "The most fantastic unreality easily paled and mingled with the real." An "educated outsider," Critchfield adds, "might be expected to grow bored and skeptical."⁹⁵

He or she might indeed—especially as Critchfield seems to share Shahhat's problem of being unable to distinguish the unreal from the real, and with the help of Ayrout has put some additional tales of violence into the mouths of his informants. Describing the military conscription of the peasant, Ayrout had explained that

to ensure his rejection he may put out one of his eyes, or cut off a couple of fingers. . . . If he can, he will hide or escape. . . . When there is no way out, and he cannot avoid leaving home to join the army, the family receives condolences and abandons itself to mourning as if for a bereavement. To leave the village is like going abroad. *Partir, c'est mourir.*⁹⁶

Critchfield relates that

Shahhat had heard how in past times young men in the village had been known to cut off their fingers or put out an eye to be rejected, or try to hide in the desert to escape. If there was no way out and they could not avoid going into the army, their families received condolences and abandoned themselves to formal mourning as if their sons were already dead. In the old days, to leave the village was to die.⁹⁷

Describing the working of vendettas in rural Egypt, Ayrout had said that sometimes

the feud is kept up in every family from generation to generation. . . . The antagonism, though usually latent, will show itself suddenly over some trivial matter, such as the shifting of a boundary mark, a theft of manure, or a *gamoossa* trespassing. Then human life counts for nothing.⁹⁸

Critchfield tells us that

even in Berat a feud, once started over a diesel pump or some other trivial affair, could go on a long time. Antagonism might show itself over something so trifling as a trespassing sheep, missing fodder, or the shifting of a boundary marker, and before long it could seem as if human life counted for nothing.⁹⁹

Ayrout's account had continued: "Thus life is lived in constant insecurity. To feel this one must spend a night in a village. As soon as night falls . . . the dogs begin to bark. . . ." He goes on to describe an incident in the village of Qalandol in 1936 (another of the historical episodes eliminated from the U.S. edition of the book), where to avenge an earlier killing in a struggle over the selection of the village headman, a man was stabbed in the marketplace. The victim's friends then "bore down on the spot with rifles and staves, crying 'Allah, Allah!'. . . . By midnight the two parties [were] determined to fight to the death. . . . The police had the greatest difficulty in restoring order."¹⁰⁰ Critchfield's passage continues with a description of the village adjacent to Berat:

But in Qurna life was lived in constant insecurity. As night fell, the dogs would start to roam and bark. . . . Sometimes a fight could start for no good reason and before long men would come running to reinforce both sides, armed with rifles and staves and shouting 'Allah, Allah!' In no time both parties would vow to fight to the death and the police faced great difficulty in restoring order.¹⁰¹

Note that in Ayrout's story the violence arose out of a serious political dispute, whereas the only point of originality in Critchfield's version is that violence now occurs "for no good reason."¹⁰²

This construction of what the Egyptian—and Third World—peasant is "really like" involves more than just a persistent plagiarism and the addition of invented incidents. There is also something missing. The account is written entirely in the third person, rendering the author, who was partly present in the village, completely absent from the scene. Critchfield only presents himself at the end, in an afterword, where there is a photograph of him standing in the village and a careful explanation of his method. He always begins the study of a "traditional village" by laboring in the fields, working alongside the person he refers to—using the possessive—as "my peasant subject." He then works with interpreters, using two of them a day ("interpreters tend to tire after five or six hours of steady translation"), to compile a voluminous ledger of his subject's recollections of past adventures and dialogues. "These became seven hundred pages of single-spaced typewritten notes," we are told. "Shahhat and I," the author adds, "were together, virtually every waking hour, for almost a year."¹⁰³ Moreover, we have

been assured in the preface that the names of the characters in the story, as well as the photographs that illustrate it, are all “real.”¹⁰⁴ The result is “as true a portrait” as he can write, Critchfield concludes, ending the book with a circular, almost desperate, assertion about Shahhat’s story: “A real person, his identity and existence are its verification.”¹⁰⁵ The claims, the details of how the account was constructed, and the confidential and possessive tone in which they are imparted to us—all placed outside the telling of the story itself—are intended to establish the author’s authority.

While in the village, Critchfield adds in the afterword, he and his interpreter “tried, as much as we were able, to remain observers and not participants, and I think, in the main, we succeeded.” But this required the “restraining influence” of the interpreter, for on several occasions, Critchfield informs us in the same paragraph, he and his peasant subject “had violent, usually drunken fights, Arab-fashion, coming to blows, once throwing chairs at each other, and sometimes actually knocking each other down.” Although these bouts of “Arab” violence left the villagers “always upset,” the American “rather enjoyed them,” as did his subject. “With the possible exception of two other peasant subjects, I doubt if I have ever gotten to know anyone, including members of my own family, as intimately as I grew to know Shahhat.” This intimacy, secretly confided to us, is intended to increase rather than undermine the author’s authority, for apparently it has nothing to do with what Critchfield calls “the story”: “when it came to events that represented progress in the story, [the interpreter] and I kept carefully aside.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the device of the confessional afterword assures us of the author’s intimate understanding, while the removal of all trace of the author’s presence from the story itself creates an effect of objectivity.¹⁰⁷

In my own copy of *Shahhat*, however, some of the book’s pages are bound out of place, with the result that a part of the afterword comes in the middle of the “story.” In the heat of a violent quarrel Shahhat is having with his mother and uncle, which causes him to leave the village for Cairo, Critchfield himself accidentally appears, speaking to us in the first person: “Advised of the quarrel by Shahhat in Cairo, I returned once more to the village. Hence I was physically present during the more dramatic episodes of the closing section.” In one of these episodes, he mentions, “I had to throw a violently hysterical scene. . . .”¹⁰⁸ After one more misplaced page we return to these very episodes, which are now haunted by this invisible, inadvertently announced presence. The separation of the author from his story is subverted, and the effect of objectivity slips away.

Yet even if your own copy of the book is correctly bound, you will sense another subversive presence haunting its pages. The storytelling elides the presence not only of the American author, but of the Westerner in general. The Western tourists and archaeologists who frequent the village and its surroundings are mentioned, but only obliquely and at a distance. Like the author, they are never allowed a presence of their own. The only straightforward account of them is the humorous description of a fleeting visit by a busload of tourists to the local pharaonic temple. The sudden intrusion is shown strictly from the villagers’ point of view: the village square is shaken into life, chairs are put out in front of the cafe, Coca-Cola and fake antiques are brought out to peddle, children

demand *bakhshīsh*, and guides shout their instructions to the harried visitors. Then suddenly the bus is gone again, and the village regains its peace and quiet.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, despite this deliberate distancing of the American and European presence, several signs slip in to indicate a more pervasive relationship.

First there is the Habu Hotel, built in the early 1960s, where Critchfield himself stayed. He describes it disingenuously as a “county inn.”¹¹⁰ As far as I know, however, it catered not to local travelers but largely to northern Europeans, attracted across the river from Luxor by the cheap rates for rooms and the even cheaper rates for local hashish. The village cafe, where Critchfield often spent his evenings, seems to have catered to a similar clientele; it was where villagers learned their English. Several of the key characters in the story receive their livelihoods and have even made fortunes from tourism or archaeology. Shahhat’s uncle, Ahmed, whom we are told represents in the story the kind of Egyptian that “accepts modernization and its values,”¹¹¹ works as a night watchman at the largest tourist hotel in Luxor.¹¹² His father’s cousin, the notorious Hagg Ali, “had grown mysteriously rich in a short time,” allegedly from illicit dealing in archaeological treasure.¹¹³ He also organizes the supply of laborers for American archaeological digs all over Egypt and is well known to organizations like the American Research Center in Egypt. Archaeology and tourism, in fact, appear to be a significant source of income for the village and certainly an integral part of its life (one or two more successful villagers have themselves become Egyptologists, I am told, including a woman from the village who is now studying for a French doctorate at Montpellier).¹¹⁴

The book ignores the village’s dependence on archaeology and tourism, just as it ignores Shahhat’s dependence on the author. Critchfield arrived in Berat just after the death of Shahhat’s father, when the boy’s family suddenly found itself seriously in debt. The opportune arrival of an American writer, willing to pay a village youth for his stories, can hardly have been irrelevant to the relationship that developed between them. Yet these forms of dependency upon Westerners and the Western economy are not discussed (“spending patterns remain traditional,” we are told),¹¹⁵ and there is no attempt to analyze the larger causes of local poverty and debt essential to their functioning. The story is one of “cultural and psychological turbulence,” and the closest it comes to discussing economic dependence is a passing reference to the male prostitution that is often part of these contemporary forms of the colonial relationship. Shahhat’s friend Snake had often told him, who in turn had told Critchfield, “that if the foreign tourists who came to visit the tombs of Qurna were more interested in himself than the fake antiques he peddled, he took them out into the desert where he would provide any service, as long as he was paid handsomely. It was not an uncommon way of earning money among the young men of Qurna.” But Shahhat himself, we are reassured immediately, “had little to do with tourists.”¹¹⁶

Since the 1970s, tourism has become the largest industry in the Nile valley, in terms of foreign earnings. Shahhat’s village might actually be somewhat “typical,” therefore, although not in any of the ways Critchfield suggests. In its inhabitants’ employment as peddlers, guides, hotel staff, part-time prostitutes, archaeological laborers, and native informants, the village perhaps typifies some of the novel ways in which the global economy of the West has penetrated areas such as rural

Egypt in the late 20th century, and put the peasant once more to work. Thus, by eliding the presence of the tourist and archaeological industries, as well as his own presence as a writer, Critchfield helps conceal the multiple ways in which peasants continue to be organized as producers for nonpeasant consumption.

Concealment, however, is the wrong word, for *Shahhat* itself forms a part of this system of production. Its role is to produce the peasant voice. Although we are assured in the afterword that Shahhat “knew no English” when Critchfield first met him, we have been told in the story itself that he had picked up some English “listening to foreigners in the cafe.” But, it is quickly added, “he never talked with them. If his friends asked why, he would say, ‘God gives me my work. I have land. Why should I speak with these foreigners. . . ? My work is to cultivate the land.’”¹¹⁷ Until, of course, Mr. Critchfield arrived at the Habu Hotel and finally persuaded the peasant boy to speak. Thanks to Critchfield, as Foster puts it in his foreword, “Shahhat the man speaks for and to us.”¹¹⁸ Just as Ayrout put into words for us the misery of peasants who were unable to feel their own suffering, Critchfield translates for us the words of a peasant who knows no English, enabling him finally to find a voice and communicate with us.

In this way, by removing from the village both the presence of the American author and the playing of the world economy, the author creates not just an effect of objectivity but also of a peasant subjectivity. Like many infinitely more respectable studies of the Third World peasant, Critchfield’s writing produces a peasant voice that appears self-formed. The voice is presented not as the product of an American writer, or even of the peasant’s encounter with the writer or with other local forms of Western hegemony, but as the speaking of an autonomous subject. Thanks to the invisible writer, the figure of the peasant is given a place in the monologue of the West, reaffirming with his presence our myth of partaking in a universal human dialogue.¹¹⁹ In this manner the peasant subject is produced for nonpeasant consumption, packaged by a university press and sold in the tourist hotels of Luxor and Cairo and in the campus bookstores of American universities.

Should Critchfield’s book be dismissed as merely an unfortunate and isolated case of plagiarism by an author who is more a popularizer than a scholar? After all, it might be said, he is clearly an enthusiastic writer whose sense of adventure and evident enjoyment of the company of some of those he writes about has given him a far greater exposure to the Third World village than any of his former colleagues among American foreign correspondents. I do not think so; not just because inserting the missing quotation marks around the passages plagiarized from Ayrout would do little to improve things but because, in the dozen years since its publication, the book itself and the realism it claims to present have never been dismissed. The problem posed by *Shahhat* is not primarily a question of plagiarism, but the question of why a book that reproduces, yet again, the racist stereotype of the Third World peasant, with all colonial history removed and all the effects of neo-colonialism made invisible, can still be so easily and widely accepted.

Shahhat was described in *The American Anthropologist* as “an excellent dramatization of peasant life,” in the *Journal of American Folklore* as “enjoyable and readable,” and in the *American Ethnologist* as capturing, despite its

“undisciplined subjectivity,” “the vividness and passionate intensity of Upper Egyptian life.”¹²⁰ George Foster’s foreword calls the book “one of the most absorbing accounts of peasant life I have ever read” and stresses “the extent to which it illuminates and confirms the points anthropologists have made about peasant society.”¹²¹ A note at the beginning of the book informs us that Richard Critchfield writes about the Third World for *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New Republic* and is the author of numerous other books and articles about peasant life. These include a subsequent work, *Villages* (1981), in which he updates the story of Shahhat and gives what he admits are brief, “rambling” accounts of about a dozen other villages he has visited, including those from his days in Vietnam. “Somewhat unexpectedly,” we are told in the paperback edition, *Villages* “drew serious attention from agricultural scientists, students of development, and Washington policymakers.”¹²² Critchfield’s research in Egypt was financed with a grant from the Ford Foundation,¹²³ and he has subsequently received grants from the Rockefeller and other foundations and been employed as a consultant on Third World villages by the U.S. Agency for International Development. His “realism” in the portrayal of the peasant has been supported, in other words, by a mass of reviewers, editors, publishers, development experts, policymakers, grant committee members, and university teachers.

In 1981, not long after the publication of *Shahhat* and immediately following the appearance of *Villages*, Critchfield was named as one of the first recipients of the new MacArthur Foundation awards, nominated secretly by unnamed scholars and given annually to individuals whose work is of outstanding intelligence and originality. Besides “the peasant,” and the Middle Eastern peasant in particular, is there any stereotype in the Orientalist portrayal of the non-West whose racism and ahistoricism could remain so acceptable, that the author of its latest incarnation might find his work so well received and rewarded?

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NOTES

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¹George Foster, Foreword to Richard Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian* (Syracuse, 1978), p. ix, emphasis added.

²Vivian Gornick, “Metaphor for Egypt,” *New York Times Book Review*, Jan. 14, 1979, p. 12.

³Pierre Gourou, *Les paysans du delta tonkinois: Etude de géographie humaine* (Paris, 1936), p. 577; English translation, *The Peasants of the Tonkin Delta: A Study of Human Geography*, vol. 1 of 2 (New Haven, 1955), p. 664.

⁴Henry Habib Ayrou, *Moeurs et coutumes des fellahs* (Collection d’études, de documents et de témoignages pour servir à l’histoire de notre temps) (Paris, 1938; reprint ed. New York, 1978), pp. i, 12. In the United States in the same period, Robert Redfield’s *Tepoztlán, A Mexican Village: A*

Study of Folk Life (Chicago, 1930) marked a shift in interest among anthropologists from “primitive” to “folk,” or later “peasant,” societies. The shift was a reaction to the 1919–1920 Mexican revolution, which had its origins in the resistance of Indian villages to the colonization of their land by Mexican sugar estates.

⁵Cf. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976); Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley, Calif., 1979).

⁶The major editions of Ayrout’s work are: Henry Habib Ayrout, *Moeurs et coutumes des fellahs* (Paris, 1938; reprint ed. New York, 1978); 2nd revised ed., entitled *Fellahs* (Cairo, 1942); Arabic ed., *al-Fallāhūn*, trans. Muḥammad Ghallāb (Cairo, 1943, 8th Arabic ed. 1968); English ed., *The Fellaheen*, trans. Hilary Wayment (Cairo, 1945); U.S. ed., *The Egyptian Peasant*, trans. John Alden Williams (Boston, 1963). The Russian translation is mentioned in Ayrout, *al-Fallāhūn* (1968), p. 7. I have mostly quoted from the Wayment translation of 1945, as this is the version used by Critchfield.

⁷Bowles was removed from the State Department in November 1961 and made Special Representative of the President for African, Asian, and Latin American Affairs. He visited Cairo and met with President Nasser in February 1962. William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy Towards Egypt, 1955–81* (Albany, N.Y., 1985), pp. 131, 249.

⁸Ayrout, *Egyptian Peasant*, p. xvi.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. v–vi.

¹⁰Richard Critchfield, *Villages* (Garden City, N.Y., 1981, reprint ed., 1983), p. 64.

¹¹Richard Critchfield, *The Long Charade: Political Subversion in the Vietnam War* (New York, 1968), p. 208.

¹²Critchfield, *Villages*, p. 66. The bulk of the short chapter on Vietnam in this book is repeated from *The Long Charade*, but quotations from the British military advisers in the first book are repeated in the second without quotation marks, as Critchfield’s own views.

¹³Mohamed Heikel, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat* (New York, 1983), pp. 8–10.

¹⁴See John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton, 1983), p. 261.

¹⁵Robert Fernea, Review of Richard Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian*, *Middle East Journal*, 33/4 (1979), pp. 506–7.

¹⁶Critchfield, *Shahhat*, pp. xiii–xiv.

¹⁷Fred H. Lawson, “Rural Revolt and Provincial Society in Egypt, 1820–1824,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13 (1981), p. 146.

¹⁸J. A. St John, *Egypt and Nubia, Their Scenery and Their People* (London, 1845), pp. 378–86; Lawson, “Rural Revolt.”

¹⁹Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. xxv.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 4.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. xv.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 111.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 195.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 138. Critchfield seems to be well aware of the effects of this kind of imagery. One of his earlier studies of peasants is an account of a group of Arabic-speaking pastoral nomads in south-western Iran, written during the regime of the Shah and told through the life of an individual named Ya’qub, which Critchfield spells as Jacob. In his preface to the book’s second edition (published by Indiana University Press in 1988), he explains that “I spelled Jacob the Biblical way to underscore its old testament quality”—for in those days “nobody mentioned Ayatollah Khomeini, . . . and Islam, though a total way of life for Bedouins, seemed relatively benign.” *The Golden Bowl Be Broken: Peasant Life in Four Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), p. ix.

²⁶Cf. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge, England, 1988), pp. 21–32.

²⁷Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. xiii. This is Critchfield’s only acknowledgment of his debt to Ayrout, from whom the passage is lifted almost verbatim: “Under foreign domination for years and centuries at a time, by Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, French and English,” wrote Ayrout, “the fellaheen have changed their masters, their religion, their language and their crops, but not their manner of life” (*The Fellaheen*, p. 19).

²⁸Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, p. 106.

²⁹Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 89.

³⁰Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, p. 132.

³¹Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. xvi.

³²Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, p. 20.

³³Ayrou, *The Egyptian Peasant*, p. 13.

³⁴Cf. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, pp. 122–25.

³⁵Gustave Le Bon, *Les lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*, translated into English as *The Psychology of Peoples* (New York, 1898), pp. 4–5, 13, 199–200.

³⁶Gordon Allport, *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson, 2nd ed. (Reading, Mass., 1968), 1:41.

³⁷Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules*, translated into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York, 1896), p. 36.

³⁸Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, p. 94.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 132–38.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵¹Ayrou, *Moeurs et coutumes*, p. 132.

⁵²The peasant, Ayrou explained, “being of a childlike disposition, cannot be presented a model house without being taught, in a kindly way, the ‘directions’ which go with it. . . . This pedagogy is more important than the material realization” (*The Egyptian Peasant*, p. 130). For a discussion of this relationship between effects of structure, individuality, and pedagogy in colonial practice, see Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, pp. 44–48, 92–94.

⁵³Ayrou, *The Egyptian Peasant*, pp. 19–20, 151.

⁵⁴There was also an active debate on these issues in the press. In *al-Ahrām* on February 17, 18, 19, 1937, for example, Bint al-Shāṭiṣ (ʿĀṣiṣha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān), the author of *al-Rif al-Miṣrī* (*Rural Egypt*) (Cairo, 1935) described the evils of the cotton processing industry, explaining how 25,000 children aged 8–15 were employed that year loading and unloading the ginning machines in cotton ginning and pressing factories, working amid stifling dust from 5 A.M. to 9 P.M. each day without a break (Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, p. 63).

⁵⁵Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, pp. 158–59.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁷The quotations in this paragraph all come from the back cover of the paperback edition of the book.

⁵⁸Ayrou, *al-Fallāḥūn* (1968), p. 7.

⁵⁹Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, pp. 41–42.

⁶⁰Ayrou, *The Egyptian Peasant*, p. 18, emphasis added; cf. Gabriel Baer, “Submissiveness and the Revolt of the Fellaḥ,” in *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt* (Chicago, 1969), p. 102.

⁶¹Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, p. 104.

⁶²Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 86.

⁶³Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, p. 106.

⁶⁴Critchfield, *Shahhat*, pp. 86–87.

⁶⁵Ayrou, *The Fellaheen*, pp. 79–80.

⁶⁶Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 5.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 51.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 35.

⁷²Ibid., p. 20.

⁷³Ibid., p. 55.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 41–42.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 44.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 50.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 60.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 101.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 147–48.

⁸³Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, p. 30.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 133–34.

⁸⁵Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 38.

⁸⁶Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, p. 119.

⁸⁷Critchfield, *Shahhat*, pp. 29–30.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. xv.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 16.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 78–79. The book's tone is persistently misogynist; another rape victim is shown in a photograph, smiling at the camera, with a caption that describes her as a "willful, flirtatious fourteen-year-old" (ibid., p. 103).

⁹³Ibid., p. x.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 139.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 100.

⁹⁶Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, p. 107.

⁹⁷Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 162.

⁹⁸Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, p. 109.

⁹⁹Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 89.

¹⁰⁰Ayrout, *The Fellaheen*, pp. 109–10.

¹⁰¹Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. 89.

¹⁰²When the villagers have had enough of all the violence, there remains the possibility of *kayf*, "a word of profound significance" according to Ayrout. He says it denotes "a kind of wakeful passivity which means doing nothing, saying nothing, thinking nothing" (*The Fellaheen*, p. 136). Critchfield explains that "in Egypt there is a mental state called *kaif*, when a man does nothing, says nothing, and thinks nothing. It is a kind of wakeful passivity" (*Shahhat*, p. 183).

¹⁰³Critchfield, *Shahhat*, pp. 227–31.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. xiv.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 231–32.

¹⁰⁷Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), pp. 160–64; Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁰⁸Critchfield, *Shahhat*, pp. 230–32.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. xiv.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹⁴Terry Burke, personal communication. The village has two primary schools and one intermediary school, and has also produced two local judges and a medical doctor.

¹¹⁵Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. xviii.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹⁷Ibid., pp. 228, 108.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. xii.

¹¹⁹See in this respect Rosalind O'Hanlon's critique of pitfalls of the *Subaltern Studies* project on the history of subordinate groups in colonial South Asia, "Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 22, 1 (1988), pp. 189–224.

¹²⁰M. Yaşar İçcan, Review of Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian*, *American Anthropologist*, 82 (1980), p. 961; Sam Beck, Review of Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian*, *Journal of American Folklore*, 93 (1980), pp. 487–88; John G. Kennedy, Review of Critchfield, *Shahhat: An Egyptian*, *American Ethnologist*, 7, 1 (1980), pp. 220–21.

¹²¹Critchfield, *Shahhat*, p. xii.

¹²²Critchfield, *Villages*, p. vii. Cf. n. 12.

¹²³Critchfield, *Shahhat*, pp. iv, vi.