Photography and the Egyptian Labor Corps in Wartime Palestine, 1917-1918

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Among the thousands of works written about the First World War, comparatively few discuss the 1917-1918 military campaign fought between the British and Ottoman empires in Palestine. As Jean Bou notes, the Palestine campaign occupies a "curious" place in the historiography of the war. With a few notable exceptions, it has received little attention from scholarly historians in a field dominated by regimental and popular histories.[2] If the campaign itself, which began with the Battle of Rafa in January 1917 and ended with the Ottoman armistice of October 1918, garners little interest from scholars, the history of Egyptian laborers working for British forces attracts even less attention. This lack of interest, in part, has to do with the ubiquitous yet invisible presence of these men and the nature of their work. The official history of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force published in 1919, for example, claimed that small detachments of the Egyptian Labor Corps (ELC) were "well-known" to all members of the Force. However, it was "given to few to observe them at work where large numbers were employed; but those who have seen many thousands of Egyptian Labour Corps labourers on task work, either driving a cutting with pick and fasse through Palestine clay, or in their thousands carrying baskets of earth to pile up some railway embankment, will long remember such examples of intensive labour." It was also "no less striking" to watch "the line of laden boats leaving the storeships off the coast and making their way through the surf to the beach, there to be hauled high by teams of cheerful Egyptians working to whistle signal under their own officers."[3]

Although it is questionable whether thousands of laborers cheerfully worked "to whistle signal under their own officers," the foregoing quotes correctly suggest visual appearances are crucial to understanding the

Palestine campaign. In this essay, I argue that one of the most important ways of "seeing" this campaign is through the photographs taken of the laborers who joined in it. Yet to analyze the photography of the Palestine campaign is a difficult proposition in light of the visual subjectivities involved and the potential for misinterpretation. Further compounding this difficulty is the traditional approach to the First World War in Palestine, which is devoted largely to military battles. With the representation of Egyptian workers as my focus, I will not address the strategies of different army units or the tactical maneuvers of British and Ottoman generals. In a sense, the preliminary argument I make about photographs of the ELC serves as a corrective to regimental histories and biographies of prominent figures, most notably General Edmund Allenby and Colonel T.E. Lawrence. Some recent studies have employed first-hand accounts of soldiers to provide a more nuanced perspective of the Palestine campaign, but the majority of works remain firmly ensconced in military history.[4] I therefore eschew a narrow approach centering on soldiers, generals, and senior officers. Instead, I maintain that by taking into account both the historical context and the interpretive power of photography in Palestine, we can advance other viewpoints that broaden our understandings of the war.

While numerous works on the Palestine campaign offer a fleeting glimpse into the lives of the Labor Corps, I bring in photographs of these men to discuss representations of their experiences serving on the front. In doing so, I concentrate on the ELC alone and do not analyze representations of other units such as the Camel Transport Corps (CTC) who also served in the extreme conditions of 1917-1918, or the Syrian and Palestine labor battalions the Ottoman Corps of Army Engineers mobilized for the war.[5] Nor do I discuss the suffering of the civilians in Palestine who interacted with the Labor Corps or Ottoman depictions of the laborers employed by the British Empire. Given the predominance of military history with respect to the Palestine campaign, I emphasize neglected images of the ELC that demand further research. Broadly speaking, we need more scholarly research on this subject and multimedia portrayals of the First World War in the Ottoman Empire. Although a small number of short films, sound recordings, and artwork of the Labor Corps exist, I examine photography in this essay because of its widespread use between 1915 and 1918. During these years, more advanced, easily acquired forms of camera technology helped to create a new visual vocabulary and language of war.[6]

With a focus on photography, I aim to fill some of the research gaps about the war in the Ottoman Empire in general and Palestine in particular. Because the war inaugurated a period of global transformation, I hope to contribute not only to the broader comparative histories, but also to ongoing scholarly efforts to rewrite its impact in the Middle East. I likewise address what photography can tell us about representations of the Palestine campaign by shifting the focus away from the politicians and military commanders who directed the war effort. In an attempt to make sense of the experience of the Egyptian laborers who served, I allude to the ways in which photographs depicted their lives and what effect these depictions had on official understandings of their wartime contributions. From a visual perspective, the mass armies of laborers the British army raised to service its logistical needs represented a significant shift from older uses of photography that attempted to document the land of Palestine and its inhabitants. In the case of prewar Palestine, photography reflected the

European colonial desire to possess Jerusalem while continuing a long tradition of presenting the city as a sacred heritage Europeans longed to control.[7]

Recognizing the differences between prewar representations of Palestine, I draw on photography as a medium that comprises disparate political, social, and cultural relationships. While I do not juxtapose photographs of the ELC with other pictures taken before the war, I bear in mind the visual antecedents shaping wartime imagery and the different perceptions of Palestine during this period of acute crisis. Emphasizing the official nature of the photographs taken of the Labor Corps, I consider how these images can help us reframe historical and historiographical questions related to the First World War. Too often, scholars have overlooked the production and consumption of photographs depicting wartime laborers. Analyzing the Palestine campaign as a process of social change that relied disproportionally on non-elite workers enables us to move beyond the confines of military history while also leading us to a better understanding of the significance of visual representations of manpower and mass mobilization. Because photographs circulate among different communities and are context-dependent, it is critical to understand who created, collected, and published (or not) images of Egyptian laborers.

What photographs of the Labor Corps exactly meant at the time will always elude us, yet they remain compelling because of their omission from most historical accounts of the Palestine campaign. The scope of photography in 1917 included Egypt and Palestine, but many photographers operated in isolation from one another with little concern for their work after they had safely dispatched it to their superiors.[8] It is therefore difficult to know what happened to photographs of the Labor Corps after their creation, whether or not they traveled in international exhibitions, and what any accompanying text and/or captions meant to viewers both during and after the war. This last point is especially significant because captions position photographs and the processes of interpretation through the interaction of image and text; even a series of photographs requires language or text to fill in the gaps in the narrative.[9] Photographs of the ELC also raise questions about the intentionality of wartime images. The British Ministry of Information, which supervised domestic, foreign, and military propaganda efforts, played an outsized role in the production of official photographs. It subsidized pictorial work of all types and enlarged the small number of photographers authorized to work in different theatres.[10] Private and official photographers took most photographs at the Ottoman front though in comparison with other theatres of war the number of official photographers was small.[11] The Ministry commissioned specific photographs of the Palestine campaign, which included numerous shots of the Labor Corps taken by private photographers.[12]

While the Ministry had an interest in housing artifacts related to the war effort, it failed to create a comprehensive repository of photographs. Many photographs of the ELC now reside in the national archives of the Imperial War Museum in London and the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. The existence of photographs from private, professional, and amateur sources in these archives point to shortcomings in the official record of the war and the fact that photographers did not take as many pictures as they technically could have.[13] The diverse character of photographic archives present difficulties for researchers of the Labor Corps, but also opens up new interpretive possibilities. Many images of

the ELC showcase the more traditionalist aspects of James Francis (Frank) Hurley and George Westmoreland, the official photographers attached respectively to the Australian and British forces in Palestine. Hurley, in particular, was not a modernist. Although he had the instincts of a commercial photographer, he was an exponent of old-fashioned pictorialism.[14] His aesthetic style emphasized the idea of collective struggle overcoming the forces of barbarism and uniting visual elements into a coherent form that appealed to popular taste.[15] Hurley, for instance, created highly romanticized images of Australian airmen and staged re-enactments of key battles that took place in Palestine, including the 1917 charge of the Australian Light Horse Brigade at Beersheba. His photographs not only reflect his deeply held belief that Palestine was part of the cultural heritage of the British peoples, but also his life-long interest in travelogue photography, a genre that some scholars have characterized as Great War Orientalism.[16]

Hurley's interest in the Palestine campaign focused primarily on the opportunities it presented. When he arrived from the Western front in 1918 with two staff members, he began taking publicity pictures with the aim of creating a record of the Australians involved in the fighting. What distinguished Hurley's photography was his increased emphasis on archiving images and devising new methods to make photographs. Few of his pictures appeared in the contemporary British press because of the technical difficulties in dispatching photographs and the desire of the Australian War Records Section in London to store their own images for the long-term record rather than for publicity.[17] While Hurley's photographs incorporated older Orientalist aesthetics, more abstract notions of beauty and humanity also influenced his work. One of the most distinctive features of his photography involves portraits of nature and humanity against industrial modernity. Among his famous images are intimate group shots of Australian soldiers expressing the values of loyalty, camaraderie, imperial service, and personal courage associated with the visual codes of pictorialism.[18] Before 1914, Hurley was a successful and widely recognized photographer, but during the war he courted controversy because of his predilection for making composite prints that combined two or more negatives.[19]

The few photographs that Hurley took of the Labor Corps reflect his aesthetic style and investment in humanist ideals of beauty, cohesion, and harmony. Similar to his shots showcasing the heroism of Australian troops, Hurley's photographs of Egyptian laborers emphasizes their human presence and the almost serene quality of their work. This sense of tranquility is most notable in a series of photographs taken on 10 January 1918 of the Labor Corps unloading stores and equipment from anchored ships at sea.[20] By interjecting a coherent, moral space outside of combat, Hurley's photography creates sublime effects often at odds with the violent and destructive consequences of warfare.[21] The official British photographer in Palestine, George Westmoreland, also composed shots in scenic or human settings. Westmoreland ran his own professional business before the war, but the British army instructed him to take photographs for publicity purposes.[22] Much like Hurley, his aesthetic style emphasized human subjects and the beauty of the landscape. Several of the photographs Westmoreland took of the ELC residing in the Imperial War Museum prominently feature Egyptian laborers toiling against the background of coastal Palestine.[23]

Natives of the Egyptian Labor Corps unloading stores and equipment from a cargo ship at Nabr-Sukereir for the Australian Light Horse Regiment. *Photo by James Francis (Frank) Hurley. Source: Australian War Memorial.*

Boatmen of the Egyptian Labor Corps manning surf boats and landing stores from the storeships, off the coast on an exceptionally calm day. *Photo by George Westmoreland. Source: Imperial War Museum.*

It is worth noting that professional photographers such as Hurley and Westmoreland enjoyed comparatively unrestricted access in Palestine compared to other theatres in the war. This access allowed them to create images that did not fit the evolving standard of photographs set in the Western front. As a rule, photographers from Britain or Australia did not work in Palestine due to the expense of travel and obstacles in technical communication. Another factor to consider is that although Westmoreland and Hurley were not subject to the constraints of a large, static military hierarchy, the picturesque qualities of their work contributed to views of the Palestine campaign as peripheral. Their photographs of soldiers and laborers lack the visual imagery of struggle and danger associated with the conflict in the European trenches.[24] For the most part, official photographs of the ELC depict its members within a logistical narrative of the Palestine campaign. Military operations at Gallipoli in 1915 witnessed the formation and growth of the ELC, but over the duration of the war its dramatic expansion proved instrumental to British military victories in Palestine. The overwhelming majority of Egyptian laborers served in the ELC and the CTC with perhaps half a million men working in these units between 1915 and 1919.[25] Regardless of the actual figures, progressively harsher recruiting methods designed to satisfy the requirements of the Palestine campaign involved enormous numbers of men. While the mobilization of workers succeeded in meeting the rapacious demands of the military, it also contributed to the build-up of powerful grievances among rural communities who gradually identified wartime hardships with the extension of British control.[26]

Because of its proximity to Egypt, many Labor Corps members served in Palestine, but some went to other fronts such as France to build railways, lay pipelines, dig trenches, and load or unload heavy materials. These men were not trained soldiers and as a result a large number of them suffered from injuries, disease, and death.[27] Not surprisingly, photographs of the ELC in Palestine show them working behind the lines serving military units and carrying much of the logistical burden of the campaign. Both the Ottoman and British armies faced enormous supply problems, but the maritime geography of Palestine presented its own challenges. In response, the British organized a new port at Deir el-Balah in the Gaza Strip, but the only method of supply further up the coast involved the transfer of goods to surfboats offshore. The army recruited some Pacific Islanders for this work, but the ELC did most of it.[28] Not only do official photographs depict the Labor Corps performing this work at Deir al-Balah, there are also photographs from the Ministry of Information that show the ELC unloading a supply hulk off Tripoli and stores and coal in Beirut.[29] These pictures, however, selectively represent the various uses of Egyptian labor in Palestine. During the Third Battle of Gaza in 1917, for example, the British army used the ELC as nighttime decoys on constantly moving boats to fool Ottoman forces.[30] After the fighting subsided, officers ordered the Labor Corps to clear the battlefield of unexploded shells and grenades, which resulted in lethal consequences for numerous workers.[31]

Despite the dangers they faced, thousands of Egyptians contributed to the military success of the Palestine campaign. In their attempt to defeat the Ottomans, the British army implemented a series of projects requiring the construction of water pipelines and rail lines across the Sinai desert to the borders of Palestine. Laborers unloaded water

Members of the Egyptian Labor Corps (ELC) building a railway siding at the site of the 69th British General Hospital. *Source: Australian War Memorial.*

pipes as they arrived at Qantara, cut a path through the desert and the hills of southern Palestine, and hauled the pipes into position. Work on the railway involved loading and unloading materials under the supervision of the Royal Engineers or the reconstruction of destroyed railway lines.[32] Photographs of the ELC in these settings do not always directly show Australian or British officers supervising engineering projects. Photographs from Shellal in 1917, for instance, display Egyptian workers laying railway tracks under the direction of British engineers and Australian soldiers.[33] By contrast, photographs in Deir al-Balah, Wadi Ghuzze, and Jisr Esdud show only the workers preparing railway tracks and repairing a damaged bridge.[34] Other photographs from 1918 feature large groups of men lifting army huts across railway lines.[35] Such images reflect both the daunting logistics and demanding physical requirements of the Palestine campaign. They also self-consciously document how Egyptian labor on railway, water lines, and military installations produced a favorable outcome for the British military.

This outcome, however, came at a high cost for those men who served in the Labor Corps. Military food and lodging sometimes offset the misery of these workers, but forced "volunteers" had almost no option except to join the British army and service its ever-growing demands.[36] Along with construction duties, the wartime responsibilities of the ELC expanded to accommodate needs on the battlefield. Some of these tasks included working as stretcher-bearers and carrying wounded soldiers down treacherous mountainsides to nearby roads.[37] Ferrying wounded soldiers was only one of the many hazards the Labor Corps encountered. Army officers frequently placed Egyptian workers in precarious situations that do not appear in official photographs. Describing the perils

of building railway tracks, W.T. Massey, the official correspondent of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, remarked how ELC construction gangs and Sikh Pioneers "proved the finest navvies in the world. They had to build the line right under the enemy's nose. Protected by a thin line of outposts the Gyppy [Egyptian] labourers worked under an hourly fear of aerial bombs." Such a fear was justified since "they got them often, and at El Arish one bomb killed and wounded thirty-nine of them. But under British and some Syrian officers, and with the splendid example of the Sikhs, they did marvellously well, and it is merely stating the obvious to say that if battalions of troops had taken their place, the line's rate of progress would not have been maintained."[38]

Massey's observations about "Gyppy labourers" working under "an hourly fear of aerial bombs" speak to the manifold threats confronting the ELC. Since German airmen bombed railways and pipelines along the northern Sinai coast, large military camps were favored targets. Some laborers ran away during bombing raids, but British engineers remained undeterred and stuck to their construction program.[39] Besides the threat of German bombs, the winter months of the campaign, especially in December 1917, brought its own dangers as well. Inadequate rations and exposure to rain and bitter cold combined to cause illness and death; by mid-December forty Egyptians had died from the cold and thousands of British soldiers had fallen sick.[40] With the public unaware of the bleak conditions in Palestine, Massey felt free to claim the Labor Corps enjoyed generous wages and relatively humane working conditions. Having observed the ELC first hand, Massey provided his readers with a sanitized version of their enlistment.[41] In his 1918 description of the Palestine campaign Massey argued that workers "received much more than the market rate of pay in the Delta, their food was good and plentiful, they had uniforms and blankets provided for them and tents to sleep in." At the end of every three months, the army gave ten days' leave on free passes "and the gangs going to their 'Blighty' made one of the cheering sights of the line – trainloads of happy labourers with pocketsful of money, singing and clapping hands and waving anything they could make in the shape of a flag. The officers, by tactful control – there was not the slightest semblance of oppression – had got the most out of them, and the Gyppy had well earned his holiday."[42] Massey again returned to the theme of "happy labourers" in his 1920 account of the campaign. Writing specifically about the ELC, he remarked how "at Ludd and Jerusalem the happy, singing Egyptians, under sympathetic British and some excellent Syrian officers, were willing helpers of British troops. They were handsomely paid, far above the labour rates in Egypt, were better fed then at home, and had good allowances of leave."[43]

Massey's apologetic commentary about "handsomely paid" Egyptians aside, photographs of the Labor Corps do not feature well-fed workers with "good allowances of leave." Instead, they depict the routine duties of the men serving in Palestine. Different images exhibit both the strict discipline required to build heavy-duty roads and railroads as well as the collective nature of wartime labor. Some photographs feature British and Australian officers supervising Egyptians as they work on a construction project; others show the ELC interacting with battalions and regiments from India and the West Indies working alongside them.[44] Because army officers organized the Labor Corps

Some members of the Egyptian Labor Corps in Palestine. (Donated by Mr. A. Waddell.) *Source: Australian War Memorial.*

into companies and subjected them to military discipline, it is rare to find pictures of individual workers; instead, swarms of Egyptians digging trenches, laying railway lines and water pipes, and loading supplies are highlighted in private and official photographs. The collaborative work of the ELC also appears in pictures taken in 1917 of uniformed men unloading supplies in France.[45] Notwithstanding the low pay and harsh discipline, photographs of the ELC similarly display them in various types of dress while performing tasks the British army deemed essential. It is not remarkable, for example, to find photographs of barefoot Egyptian workers in Palestine wearing threadbare clothing.[46] By contrast, the few photographs of the Labor Corps in France show them attired in boots, caps, and weather-appropriate clothes.[47]

That many photographs date from 1917 and 1918 is also not unusual since demands for labor surged as the British army expanded into Palestine from the Sinai desert. In addition to requests for greater manpower, military authorities paid greater attention to the importance of visual propaganda. Official photographers eventually began to take over the responsibility of supplying professional-quality photographs of the war to the international media.[48] Photographs of the ELC thus not only reflected the growing desire to document military operations in Palestine, but also the difficulty of mobilizing men and local resources from areas under British occupation.[49] Although military officers employed Egyptian laborers from the beginning of the war, the flow of volunteers for the ELC and the CTC began to dry up in 1917, prompting British officials to resort to aggressive recruiting practices.[50] Yet photographic evidence of abuse is practically nonexistent; there

are no photographs of officers meting out lashes or flogging despite their widespread use to discipline Egyptian laborers. The lack of such photographs, in part, reflects army regulations, which did not legally permit the flogging of "native" personnel.[51] Another reason has to do with inaccurate and poor record keeping. It appears that the army did not register even serious incidents of abuse or indiscipline.[52] On the contrary, the official record of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force claimed that it "stands to the lasting credit of the officers of the Egyptian Labour Corps, that certain companies, under selected Egyptian Labour Corps officers, reached such a high standard in connection with work on roads, railways, pipe-line, and other services, that they were able to make satisfactory progress without constant expert supervision."[53]

The selective nature of photography featuring the Labor Corps similarly extends to their death. At the war's end, the bodies of many workers lay buried from the Suez Canal to Palestine, but no photographs of mass gravesites for them exist as far as I am aware.[54] The official photographs taken of Egyptian laborers meant that some of the last visual traces of dead workers remained out of the grasp of their families. Unlike the photo albums of wounded and deceased soldiers, pictures of dead ELC members did not circulate back to grieving families in Egypt as artifacts of mourning and memory.[55] As a result, photographic images of the Labor Corps languished in national archives like the Imperial War Museum and the Australian War Memorial, and outside the popular memory of the war. Such an omission was somewhat at odds with the mandate of official photography, which attempted to record and explain the working conditions of Egyptian laborers in Palestine despite the technical difficulties involved. The power of these particular images, however, lies not only in their depiction of the working conditions of the Labor Corps, but also in their capacity to suggest and represent certain types of wartime experiences.

With a clearer understanding of their context, many photographs of the ELC evoke potent and immediate experiences of the human cost of the war. They also speak to the fact that colonial governments used the First World War to preserve official, commercial, and private photographs as archival records. Both Australia and Britain established record-keeping sections in an effort to preserve their forces' contributions to the war and inducted a select group of military photographers to take images for the press.[56] This was a critical decision since photographs have inextricably linked meanings as images and objects; there is an enduring, yet ambiguous, bond of image and form that are the products of direct intention.[57] The balance between various categories of photographs and their intended audiences likewise reflects the shifting priorities within different theatres of the war and the eclectic photographers who supplied visual material related to combat.[58] While I discussed a select number of photographs in this essay, my argument focused primarily on the importance of historical context in understanding images of the ELC and the official meanings associated with them.

Given their origins, depictions of Egyptian laborers constitute some of the most intrusive examples of wartime photography in the Middle East. Alongside the documentation of the hardships that accompanied the Palestine campaign, photographs from 1917-1918 exhibit the heavy demands placed on workers. Army officials expected thousands of laborers to supply and transport their forces from the Suez Canal to Jerusalem and maintain vast

quantities of logistical materials for extended operations. The introduction of the tools of industrialized warfare to Palestine, however, did not lessen the demand for manpower or local resources but instead remained dependent on them until the end of the war.[59] Photographs of the ELC clearly display the dependency of British and Australian forces on manual labor and the stark conditions that workers routinely faced. For this reason, visual media showcasing laborers can contribute to a more dynamic study of the war's impact in Palestine by drawing on various perspectives. Since photographs exist as intentionally authored documents and represent multiple historical presences, they constantly refer to cultural encounters and intersections beyond their framed boundaries.[60] In short, photography helps us to understand the war both as a point of fracture and disappearance as well as a shift in cultural uses of the past.[61] While we cannot know exactly how the military authorities used photographs of the Labor Corps, their existence plays a vital role in the continuing struggle to understand the significance of the First World War in the Middle East.

More interdisciplinary studies will help to decipher the complexities involved in the wartime photography of laborers in addition to the ideological uses of these pictures. Examining photographs of Egyptian workers as visual texts in their own right, rather than treating as them as anecdotal or secondary images to those of soldiers and generals, enriches our understanding of the disparate experiences of the war. By subjecting this material to careful analysis, we can better appreciate the context necessary to interpret wartime photographs and the circumstances of their creation. The focus of this article was therefore on how photography represented a largely forgotten dimension of the Palestine campaign. Photographs of Egyptian laborers do not appear to have circulated widely, but they nonetheless have layered meanings. Whether in print or digital form, their presence invites viewers to pay attention to their original context and their pictorial conventions. These images likewise demand that scholars rethink the place of photography during and after the war as well as the official collection, use, and circulation of visual records. Finally, studying photographs of the Labor Corps as multifaceted artifacts enables historians of this period perhaps to catch a glimpse of the loss and suffering of the men gazing back at us from the archives. Since war photographs rarely exist as discrete, independent images, they not only offer evidence of the hard labor and suffering of Egyptian workers, but also broaden our understanding of other ways of seeing the Palestine campaign.

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Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Issam Nassar, Mustafa Aksal, and Elizabeth Thompson for their support in writing this article as well as Hofstra University, which provided valuable release time enabling its research and completion.

2 Jean Bou, "The Palestine Campaign 1916-18: Causes and Consequences of a Continuing Historical Neglect," http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j40/bou.asp#_edn4 (accessed November 18, 2013).

3 Great Britain, *A Brief Record of the Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1919), 109. The British army created the ELC to fulfill the need for labor in the 1915 Gallipoli campaign. After 1915, the ELC grew to several hundred thousand men who worked in Egypt, France, Mesopotamia, and Salonika. Finding men to serve in the Labor Corps was often difficult because of disputes over the length of contracts and the coercive methods used to increase enlistment, which included compulsory recruitment. See John Starling and Ivor Lee, *No Labour, No Battle: Military Labour during the First World War* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2009), 185, 270-273.

4 See, for example, David R. Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006); John D. Grainger, *The Battle for Palestine 1917* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006); Michael J. Mortlock, *The Egyptian Expeditionary Force in World War I: A History of the British-Led Campaigns in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2011); Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-22* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Edward C. Woodfin, *Camp and Combat on the Sinai and Palestine Front: The Experience of the British Empire Soldier, 1916-18* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

5 For a brief discussion of the labor battalions in Palestine, see Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem Between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 26-29; Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 10-11, 45, 56, 97-98, 101, 106-107.

6 Sandy Callister, *The Face of War: New Zealand's Great War Photography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), 5.

7 Issam Nassar, *European Portrayals of Jerusalem: Religious Fascinations and Colonialist Imaginations* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 142-143. Studies that discuss the development of photography in Palestine rarely address the First World War and broadly focus on the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. These publications imagine Palestine as it relates to Jewish immigration, European colonialism, or the Holy Land. For a representative sample of these works, see Jacob Landau, *Abdul-Hamid's Palestine* (London: Andrew Deutsch, 1979); Yeshayahu Nir, *The Bible and the Image: The History of Photography in the Holy Land, 1839-1899* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Vivienne Silver-Brody, *Documentors of the Dream: Pioneer Jewish Photographers in the Land of Israel, 1890-1933* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1998); Kathleen Stewart Howe, *Revealing the Holy Land: The Photographic Exploration of Palestine* (Santa Barbara: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1997); Colin Osman, *Jerusalem: Caught in Time* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Willy Lindwer and Hermine Pool, eds., *From Jerusalem with Love: A Fascinating Journey through the Holy Land with Art, Photography and Souvenirs, 1799-1948* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Waanders, 2010).

8 Jane Carmichael, *First World War Photographers* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 149.

9 Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction," in Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 11. As Susan Sontag argues, captions explain or falsify all photographs; the meaning of a picture depends on how it is identified or misidentified, i.e., on words. See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 10, 29.

10 Gary Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 128-129.

11 Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 85-86.

12 Anonymous photographs from the Ministry of Information feature the Labor Corps landing and unloading stores from surfboats at Jaffa and restoring the wells and cisterns of Beitin. See http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205248137 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205248139 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205248145 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205248125 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/

item/object/205248126 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205248134 (accessed November 17, 2013).

13 Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 151.

14 Robert Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity: Frank Hurley's Synchronized Lecture Entertainments* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), 51. Hurley was born in Sydney, Australia and became one of the Australian Imperial Force's official photographers with the honorary rank of captain. He spent years creating popular attractions using film and photographic techniques that he believed would engage the public imagination. See "Captain James Francis (Frank) Hurley, OBE," http://www.awm.gov.au/people/222.asp (accessed November 26, 2013).

15 Callister, *The Face of War*, 62.

16 Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 54.

17 Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 85.

18 Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 153.

19 Anne Wilkes Tucker, "Part III/The Fight," in Anne Wilkes Tucker, Will Michels, and Natalie Zelt, eds., *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and Its Aftermath* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2012), 167-168. Interestingly, the Australian War Memorial has created a few composite panorama shots of the ELC in Palestine from June 1917 that exist only as digital prints. The original photographers of these prints are unknown. See "Members of the Egyptian Labour Corps working under the direction of Australian soldiers constructing overflow watering points at Wady Ghuzze," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A01975P/ (accessed November 17, 2013); "Australian engineers and members of the Egyptian Labour Corps working on the construction of a railway bridge over Wady Ghuzze, north of Umm Wigan," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/A01976P/ (accessed November 17, 2013).

20 See, for example, "Members of the Egyptian Labour Corps, attached to the Australian Light Horse, unloading stores and equipment from a steamer using lighters, at Nalin Sukereir," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B01415/ (accessed November 17, 2013); "An Egyptian labour corps, attached to the Australian Light Horse, unloading stores and equipment from a steamer using lighters at Nehr Sukerier," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B01423/ (accessed November 17, 2013); "Natives of the Egyptian Labour Corps unloading stores and equipment from a cargo ship at Nabr-Sukereir from the Australian Light Horse Regiment," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B01501/ (accessed November 17, 2013); "Near Nab Sukereir. Locals of the Egyptian Labor Corps landing at the beach after unloading a cargo of stores and equipment from the anchored ships at sea," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B01553/ (accessed November 17, 2013).

21 Dixon, *Photography, Early Cinema and Colonial Modernity*, 153. Because improving the appearance of things is one of the functions of photography, beautifying tends to bleach out the moral response of what the camera shows. See Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 81.

22 Westmoreland served in the ranks of the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment during the war. The army promoted him from private to sergeant on December 16, 1916, but he did not begin working regularly in Palestine until General Allenby's arrival in July 1917. See Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 82-85.

23 See, for example, "The wharf at Jaffa; Egyptian Labour Corps boatmen unloading stores from surfboats," http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205067329 (accessed November 17, 2013); "Boatmen of the Egyptian Labour Corps manning surf boats and landing stores from the store ships, off the coast on an exceptionally calm day," http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205067365 (accessed November 17, 2013).

24 Carmichael, *First World War Photographers*, 84, 96.

25 Egyptian historians reject the official figures provided by the British Foreign Office and claim the real figure is more than one million. See Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics*, 115-116; Ruiz, "Competing Pursuits, Collective Experiences," 301.

26 Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics*, 139. See also Mario M. Ruiz, "Manly Spectacles and Imperial Soldiers in Wartime Egypt, 1914-19," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, 3 (2009), 364-365.

27 Mario M. Ruiz, "Competing Pursuits, Collective Experiences: Egyptian Labour Mobilisation and the First World War," in Andreas Lyberatos, ed., *Social Transformation and Mass Mobilisation in the Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean Cities, 1900-1923* (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2013), 300.

28 Grainger, *Battle for Palestine 1917*, 151.

29 For examples of anonymous ELC photographs taken in Tripoli from the Ministry of Information's collection, see http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247924 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.

iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247925 (accessed November 17, 2013). For anonymous photographs of the ELC in Beirut from the same collection, see http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247902 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247903 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247904 (accessed November 17, 2013).

30 Grainger, *Battle for Palestine*, 126.

31 Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, 42-43.

32 Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics*, 122. See, for example, the anonymous 1918 photograph captioned "Royal Engineers and Egyptian Labour Corps, reconstructing a destroyed railway line on the Jaffa-Jerusalem railway. The engine and carriages are in the background," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B02299/ (accessed November 17, 2013).

33 See, for example, the anonymous 1917 photographs captioned "Egyptian Labour Corps laying railway tacks directed by British Engineers outside Shellal," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J00460/ (accessed November 17, 2013) and "Local Men under the supervision of Australian soldiers constructing a railway across the desert," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/B02594/ (accessed November 17, 2013).

34 See, for example, the anonymous 1917 photograph captioned "Members of the Egyptian Labour Corps (ELC) building a railway siding at the site of the 69th British General Hospital," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H00650/ (accessed November 17, 2013) and the photograph donated by Major L.C. Timperley with the caption "EGYPTIAN LABOUR CORPS PREPARING A TRACK AT WADY GHUZZE FOR A RAILWAY LINE, WHICH EVENTUALLY RAN TO HAIFA," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J02461/ (accessed November 17, 2013). It is unclear how Major Timperley came into possession of this photograph or if he took it. See also the photograph Mr. F.H. Smith donated with the caption "A BRIDGE ON THE MAIN ROAD GAZZA-JAFFA AT JISR ESDUD, WHICH WAS BLOWN UP BY THE TURKS IN THEIR RETREAT AFTER THE FALL OF GAZA AND BEERSHEBA. THE DAMAGE WAS REPAIRED BY THE EGYPTIAN LABOUR CORPS SOME OF WHOM CAN BE SEEN IN THE VALLEY," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J02843/ (accessed November 17, 2013). It is unclear how Mr. Smith came into possession of this photograph or if he took it.

35 See, for example, "Ludd, Palestine. C.1918. Members of the Egyptian Labour Corps carrying a hut across the railway line," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H02870/ (accessed November 17, 2013); "Ludd, Palestine. C.1918. Members of the Egyptian Labour Corps carrying a hut to a new location," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H02871/ (accessed November 17, 2013). Colonel D.G. Croll donated these photographs, but it is unclear who took them or how they came into his possession.

36 Tamari, *Year of the Locust*, 9.

37 Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*, 274; Woodfin, *Camp and Combat*, 95.

38 W. T. Massey, *The Desert Campaigns* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1918), 31.

39 Grainger, *Battle for Palestine*, 19.

40 Woodfin, *Camp and Combat*, 106.

41 Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, 42.

42 Massey, *The Desert Campaigns*, 31-32.

43 W.T. Massey, *Allenby's Final Triumph* (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1920), 175. When Allenby's troops arrived near Amman, Massey bivouacked with Australian troops and their Egyptian drivers. After observing the Australians prepare themselves for the night, he boasted how the "Australian treated his Egyptian driver like a man who was doing the same job as himself, and if he discriminated between the white and coloured man the advantage was certainly in favour of the latter. I am inclined to think that the Egyptian who did service with General Allenby's Army had during the war the best time of his life. He was a willing, if sometimes stupid, fellow, but he did not grouse or agitate, and to all appearances he was quite contented and moderately happy." See Massey, *Allenby's Final Triumph*, 210.

44 For photographs the Reverend H H Williams took of the Labor Corps working with the British West Indies Regiment, see http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205285069 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205285070 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205285072 (accessed November 17, 2013). It is unclear if the photographer of these pictures was the Rt. Reverend Henry Herbert Williams, Bishop of Carlisle. For anonymous photographs from the Ministry of Information's collection showing the ELC assisting three battalions of Indian Pioneers, see http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247897 (accessed November 17, 2013); http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205247898 (accessed November 17, 2013).

45 For a brief discussion of one such photo see

Mario Ruiz, "The Egyptian Labor Corps," https://blogs.commons.georgetown.edu/world-war-i-in-the-middle-east/web-projects/mario-ruiz-the-egyptian-labor-corps/ (accessed October 23, 2013). See also the ELC photographs Lt. Ernest Brooks took in France: "Men of the Egyptian Labour Corps handling stores at the Quay, Boulogne, 12th August, 1917," http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205079356 (accessed November 17, 2013); "Men of the Egyptian Labour Corps unloading stores at Boulogne, 12th August 1917," http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205079358 (accessed November 17, 2013). Brooks was the first official British photographer in the Western front. He worked as a photographer for the *Daily Mirror* before the war, but after receiving the honorary rank of Second Lieutenant the army instructed him to take a wide variety of photographs. See National Library of Scotland, "First World War 'Official Photographs,'" http://digital.nls.uk/first-world-war-official-photographs/pageturner.cfm?id=75208532 (accessed November 27, 2013).

46 See "SOME MEMBERS OF THE EGYPTIAN LABOUR CORPS IN PALESTINE," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J03149/ (accessed November 17, 2013). Mr. A. Waddell donated this photograph, but it is unclear who took it or how it came into his possession. In terms of clothing, the official ELC uniform consisted of a loose khaki tunic, knee-length trousers, a camelhair skullcap, and a short cotton turban. See Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*, 273.

47 Such photographs, however, are problematic in light of the varied experiences of the Labor Corps in France. Captain Reg Lane, a subaltern in the ELC, remarked at how the question of footwear arose when Egyptian laborers arrived in France. The men apparently refused to wear army boots and instead tied the laces together and marched along with them around their necks. See Mortlock, *Egyptian Expeditionary Force*, 95-96.

48 Anne Wilkes Tucker, "Perspectives on Images of Armed Conflict: An Interview with Hilary Roberts and Jeffrey WM Hunt," in Tucker, Michels, and Zelt, eds., *War/Photography*, 284.

49 Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics*, 116-117.

50 Ruiz, "Competing Pursuits, Collective Experiences," 301-302.

51 Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land*, 42; Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics*, 125. I have found only one disturbing photograph suggesting the threat of violence. See "NATIVES OF THE EGYPTIAN LABOUR CORPS BATHING, BY FORCE, IN THE ABLUTION POOL AT KHAN YUNIS, IN 1917," http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/J05981/ (accessed November 17, 2013). Mr. J.A. Henderson donated this photograph, but it is unclear if he took it.

52 Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*, 275.

53 Great Britain, *A Brief Record*, 109.

54 There are no accurate records detailing the casualties of the ELC; most men lie in unidentified graves except for a few officers. See Starling and Lee, *No Labour, No Battle*, 270-271, 280. There are, however, a few online photographs of ELC monuments and headstones. See, for example, Uri Zackhem, "Dayr Sunayd: Egyptian labour corps monument & graves," http://www.palestineremembered.com/Gaza/Dayr-Sunayd/Picture10456.html (accessed November 20, 2013). Zackhem, an Israeli Jewish contributor to the website "Palestine Remembered," http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/General/Story1920.html, uploaded this photograph on December 22, 2006. See also Ivor Lee, "Military Labour during the First World War: Casualties," http://www.labourcorps.co.uk/Pages/Casualties.html (accessed November 20, 2013). Lee is an independent researcher and co-author of *No Labour, No Battle*.

55 On presence and absence in family albums of the First World War, see Callister, *The Face of War*, 103-121.

56 Ann Wilkes Tucker, "Part II/The Wait," in Tucker, Michels, and Zelt, eds., *War/Photography*, 142.

57 Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction: Photographs as Objects," in Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London and New York, 2004), 2.

58 Hilary Roberts, "War Photographers: A Special Breed?" in Tucker, Michels, and Zelt, eds., *War/Photography*, 10.

59 Ulrichsen, *Logistics and Politics*, 138.

60 Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction," in Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards, eds., *Photography, Anthropology, and History: Expanding the Frame* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 4-5, 7. Sontag astutely notes that the photographic image is "always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude." See Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 46.

61 Elizabeth Edwards, *The Camera as Historian: Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 244.